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Fear grips Gurugram amid 'illegal' immigrants check

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NSDL launching IPO from 30 July, eyes ₹ 4,000 crore

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Wrestling legend Hulk Hogan dies at 71

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EC rigged Karnataka polls, I have 100% proof: Rahul

EC: Why threaten a Constitutional body with baseless claims?

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Congress has "concrete 100 per cent proof" that the Election Commission allowed cheating in a constituency in Karnataka, Rahul Gandhi claimed on Thursday and warned the poll panel that it will not get away with this "because we are going to come for you".

Gandhi alleged that the poll panel is not functioning as the Election Commission of India (EC) and is "not doing its job".

In response, the EC asked why Gandhi had chosen to threaten a Constitutional body. A spokesperson of the EC wondered as to why such "baseless and threatening allegations are being made against the CEC and that too now".

Asked about the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's reported remarks that the option of boycotting the Bihar assembly polls was open, Gandhi told reporters that his party has "concrete 100 per cent proof" of the EC allowing cheating in a seat in Karnataka.

"Not 90 per cent, when we decide to show it to you, it is a 100 per cent proof," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha speaking outside the Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

> **If you (Election Commission) think you are going to get away with this, if your officers think they are going to get away with this, you are mistaken, because we are going to come for you**
>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Congress Leader

> **I agree with his statement. I have also started my own investigation regarding this in Bengaluru Rural constituency. Many irregularities have taken place here too**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Karnataka Chief Minister

"We just looked at one constituency and we found this. I am absolutely convinced that constituency after constituency this is the drama that is taking place. Thousands and thousands of new voters, how old are they? -- 45, 50, 60, 65, thousands and thousands of them in one constituency. This is one thing, voter deletion, voter addition, new voters who are way above 18 (is going on)... so we have caught them," Gandhi told reporters in Parliament House premises.

The Congress leader on Wednesday had alleged that elections are being "stolen" in India and claimed that his party has figured out the modus operandi of the "votes theft" by studying a Lok Sabha constituency in Karnataka.

Responding to Gandhi's statement, the EC said it is "highly unfortunate" that rather than filing an election petition in accordance with section 80 of the Representation of the People Act, or if filed, awaiting the verdict of the high court, he has not only made "baseless allegations" but also "chosen to threaten" a Constitutional body.

The EC said as far as the Karnataka electoral rolls of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls are concerned, not a single appeal was filed with any of the district magistrates or the Chief Electoral officer of the State -- a valid legal remedy available to the Congress under section 24 of the RP Act. —PTI

> **This agreement will prove especially beneficial for India's youth, farmers, fishermen and MSME sector. India will be able to access products made in the UK such as medical devices and aerospace parts**
>
> -Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister

> **A landmark deal with India means jobs, investment, and growth here in the UK. (This is) the biggest and most economically significant deal we have made (since Brexit)**
>
> -Keir Stammer, British Prime Minister

India-UK sign largest trade deal pact, slash 99% tariffs

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

India and the UK on Thursday inked a landmark free trade agreement that seeks to boost both the economies, slash tariff lines across 99 per cent of Indian exports, unlock thousands of jobs and cut tariffs on British whisky, cars and an array of other items.

The pact, officially named as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), was signed by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and British Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds in the presence of the Prime Ministers of India and the UK.

The deal was formalised shortly after British PM Keir Starmer hosted his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi his countryside residence.

The CETA, firmed up after three years, is expected to ensure comprehensive market access for Indian goods across all sectors and India will gain from tariff elimination on about 99 per cent of tariff lines (product categories) covering almost 100 per cent of the trade values, officials said.

In his remarks to the media, Modi said the UK and India are "natural partners" and said the nations were "writing a new chapter" in their history. He highlighted Indian textiles, footwear, gems and jewellery, seafood and engineering goods will get better market access in the UK. Notably, Indian firms and freelancers can work in 36 service sectors with no Economic Needs Test.

Modi also highlighted the Khalistani threat in the UK.

"Forces with extremist ideologies must not be allowed to misuse democratic freedoms," Modi said, thanking UK for condemning the Pahalgam attack. —PTI

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Parliament adjourned over protests on SIR

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Rajya Sabha was adjourned for the day shortly after reconvening from lunch, following heated protests from opposition MPs regarding the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. Earlier, the House was suspended till 2pm amidst uproar over the rejection of adjournment notices seeking discussions on various pressing issues, including the SIR. When the session resumed, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025 was on the agenda, but did not progress far. Similarly, the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the fourth consecutive day amid protests by the Opposition demanding a discussion over the roll revision. Speaker Om Birla asked the protesting members to go back to their seats in the morning. As the din continued, Birla adjourned the proceedings in less than seven minutes. One question was taken up before the proceedings were adjourned till 2pm. When the House reconvened, little transaction occurred before it was adjourned for the day. —PTI

SC stays Bombay HC verdict acquitting 7/11 blasts accused

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

In a significant development, the Supreme Court of India has stayed the Bombay High Court's ruling that acquitted all 12 defendants in the 2006 Mumbai train bombings case but clarified they need not return to prison.

On Thursday, the bench comprising Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh issued notice to the accused, prompting them to respond to the Maharashtra government's appeal against the High Court's judgement. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta contended that the High Court's acquittal could jeopardise ongoing trials.

The Bombay High Court had previously ruled on 21 July that the prosecution's case was unproven, stating it was "hard to believe" the accused committed the crime. Of the 12 individuals, five had received death sentences, and seven were sentenced to life imprisonment. —PTI

HC perversely granted bail to Darshan, says SC

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Supreme Court called the Karnataka High Court's decision to grant bail to Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa and six others in the Renukaswamy murder case a "perverse exercise" of power.

A bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan reserved its verdict on Karnataka government's appeal against the bail.

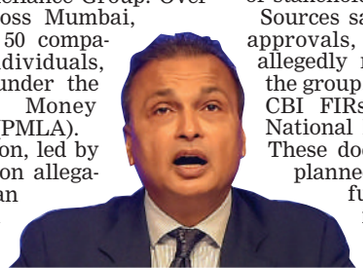
"This is the perverse exercise of discretionary powers in grant of bail to accused," Justice Pardiwala said. "What is worrying is that the manner in which the High Court dictated the order...does the HC dictate the same kind of order in every matter?" —PTI

>>>More on Page 2

ED RAIDS 50 ANIL AMBANI-BACKED COMPANIES

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday initiated extensive raids linked to an alleged bank loan fraud amounting to Rs 3,000 crore involving Anil Ambani's Reliance Group. Over 35 premises across Mumbai, associated with 50 companies and 25 individuals, were searched under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).



The investigation, led by the ED, focuses on allegations of illicit loan diversions from Yes Bank to Ambani's group companies between 2017 and 2019. Reliance Power and Reliance Infrastructure, two entities in the group, stated in regulatory filings that the ED's actions have had "absolutely no impact" on their operations or stakeholders.

Sources said that prior to the loan approvals, Yes Bank promoters allegedly received funds linked to the group. The case stems from two CBI FIRs and reports from the National Housing Bank and SEBI. These documents suggest a "well-planned scheme" to divert public funds, cheating banks, investors, and stakeholders. —PTI

>>>More on Page 7

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AI CRASH TRAUMA

112 pilots called in sick on 1 day

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Air India witnessed a "minor increase" in sick leaves reported by pilots across its fleet in the aftermath of the Ahmedabad plane crash, with 112 pilots reporting sick in a single day on 16 June, according to the government.

In response to a Lok Sabha member's query, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol on Thursday said, "Air India reported a minor increase in sick leaves reported by pilots across all fleets in the aftermath of the AI-171 accident. On 16 June, a total of 112 pilots reported sick, comprising of 51 Commanders (P1) and 61 First Officers (P2)."

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) medical circular, issued in February 2023, had advised airlines to have a separate, standalone and customised training capsule for the flight crew/ATCOs (Air Traffic Controllers) to manage mental health conditions. Boeing 787-8 crash on 12 June killed 260, only one passenger survived. —PTI

RCB stampede: Gold stolen from victim during autopsy

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

The mother of a 14-year-old girl who died in the RCB stampede on 4 June near Chinnaswamy Stadium has lodged a police complaint, alleging that her daughter's gold earrings were stolen during the post-mortem.

Ashwini, the mother of Divyanshi, reported that the family earrings carried sentimental value and were missing when her daughter's body was returned after the autopsy. She told reporters on Thursday, "She did not remove them for one year... I wanted to save those earrings as a keepsake."

Hospital officials did not help. "They have admitted that theft occurred, but they didn't return the earrings," she lamented.

Commercial Street Police have registered a case. The 4 June stampede during RCB's IPL victory rally, resulted in 11 deaths. —PTI

Anganwadi staff to protest face recognition rollout

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

The Karnataka State Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers will protest at Freedom Park, Bengaluru, on 26 July, at 11am. Affiliated with AITUC, the federation opposes the Centre's facial recognition system used in Anganwadi centres under Poshan Abhiyaan, citing technical issues like poor connectivity, lack of Aadhaar-linked phones, and OTP failures. These problems hinder food distribution to children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. The federation is also demanding exemption from election duties, arguing that Anganwadi workers already face excessive workloads. They have urged both the Centre and the Election Commission to reconsider these decisions, saying the technology and added responsibilities are unviable and unfair to frontline workers. *—PTI*

₹718 cr sanctioned for Blr-Mysuru highway upgrade

MYSURU, 24 JULY

Mysuru MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar announced that the Union government has sanctioned Rs 718 crore for key upgrades on the Bengaluru-Mysuru National Highway. The funds will prioritise the construction of a long-pending flyover near Manipal Hospital junction, along with service roads, underpasses, and other infrastructure to improve traffic flow. Wadiyar thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari for the allocation. He also criticised the Karnataka government for issuing GST notices to small traders previously exempt from the tax, calling it harassment. Wadiyar accused the state of discouraging digital payments and engaging in vendetta politics, noting that such notices were issued only in Karnataka. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

K'taka HC stays deportation of Russian woman

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

The Karnataka High Court has stayed the deportation of a Russian woman's two children, stressing the need to prioritise their welfare under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Justice S Sunil Dutt Yadav passed the interim order during a writ petition hearing challenging the sudden deportation move. Advocate Beena Pillai, for the petitioner, argued the children's rights were ignored. The Assistant Solicitor General stated the minors lack valid travel documents, prompting the court to deem immediate deportation unreasonable. Authorities must now submit affidavits confirming the documentation status, with objections due in two weeks. *—PTI*

Worms found in pongal served at Rameshwara Cafe

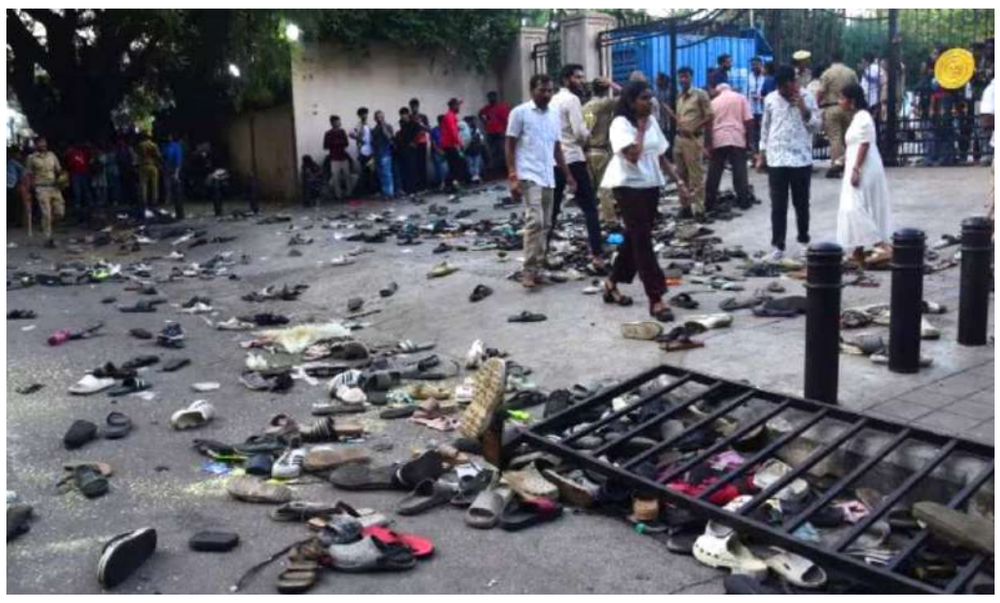
BENGALURU, 24 JULY

A customer at the Rameshwaram Café outlet in Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport allegedly found a worm in a serving of pongal on Thursday morning. He claimed staff initially tried to dismiss the complaint. Co-owners Raghavendra Rao and Divya Rao responded, with Raghavendra saying they are trying to contact the customer, who appears to be travelling. Divya Rao expressed doubts, suggesting it could be a deliberate attempt to damage the brand, citing past incidents where customers allegedly planted worms—some caught on CCTV. The café, popular for its South Indian fare, has five outlets in Bengaluru and one in Hyderabad. *—Agencies*

Cabinet accepts stampede report; RCB, DNA to face heat

Ahead of Monsoon session, State to consider slew of Bills

BENGALURU, 24 JULY



The Cabinet will initiate action against organisations that were involved in holding the celebration **PHOTO: PTI**

State Cabinet on Thursday accepted Justice John Michael D'Cunha's report on the Chinnaswamy Stadium stampede which killed 11 people on 4 June.

The Cabinet also decided that it will initiate action against private organisations that were involved in holding the RCB victory celebration, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said after the meeting.

"The Cabinet has decided to accept Justice John Michael D'Cunha's report and take legal action on its basis," he said.

The legal action will be against private associations and companies such as the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) and DNA Entertainment Networks. As far as the officers are concerned, a departmental inquiry will be initiated, Patil said.

CABINET APPROVES SPACE TECH CENTRE

Patil said that the Cabinet approved several key initiatives, including the setting up of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) in space technology.

The proposed SpaceTech CoE will be established as a Section 8 company under the Companies Act, 2013, with a total allocation of Rs 10 crore over five years.

"The Satellite Communication Industry Association (SIA-India) has been selected as the industry partner," Patil said.

CABINET APPROVES LOCAL ECONOMY ACCELAERATOR

The Cabinet also approved the launch of the Local Economy Accelerator Programme (LEAP) with a total budget allocation of Rs 1,000 crore over five years. In the first year, Rs 200 crore will be allocated for implementation.

The Cabinet also approved amendments to the Karnataka Global Capability Centre (GCC) Policy 2024-29 to improve clarity and consistency in the policy language and structure, he added.

TO TAKE UP GIG WORKER BILL

The Cabinet approved the conversion of the existing ordinance on gig workers into a formal Bill.

The "Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) – 2025" Bill, originally promulgated as an ordinance on 30 May, will be introduced in the upcoming legislature session, Patil said.

The monsoon session is set to start from 11 August. *—PTI*

MAHADAYI ROW

Goa CM Sawant has lost mental balance, says DKS

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday hit back at Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant over his remarks on the Mahadayi river project, saying he had "lost his mental balance" and that the State would proceed with the project.

Shivakumar, also the water resources minister said he would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Ministers concerned to discuss the matter.

Addressing the Goa Assembly on Tuesday, Sawant had claimed that the Centre would not approve the Mahadayi project. He had also said the Goa government would file a contempt petition in the Supreme Court against Karnataka for trying to divert the Mahadayi water.

"(Sawant) has lost his mental balance; he is not aware of the federal structure. The Mahadayi water award has already been decided, and a tender has been invited," Shivakumar said. "The tender has been floated, and work must begin. Only forest clearance was required, and we were given a notice, but nowhere were we told not to take up the work.He cannot stop us; he doesn't have that right. I will start the work. Let them try to stop it—let me see," Shivakumar said.

> **Sawant's remarks on the Mahadayi project is an insult to the people of Karnataka. Is this how federalism works under BJP? Backdoor sabotage, silence and betrayal? What crime has Kannadigas committed? Are we being punished for not surrendering to the BJP?**
>
> —Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Shivakumar urged State MPs to stand united.

"I will meet all the MPs from the State and seek their support. This is a matter of self-respect for the party. It is wrong on the part of the State MPs not to raise their voice on this issue," he said.

"I will try to take an all-party delegation to Delhi".

—Salar News with Agencies

RENUKASWAMY MURDER

SC pulls up HC for granting bail to Darshan, six others

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Supreme Court on Thursday pulled up the Karnataka High Court's for granting bail to Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa and six others in the Renukaswamy murder case. The bench further questioned the way the High Court dealt with the statements of two eye witnesses, Kiran and Puneet, calling them "unreliable witnesses".

A bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan was hearing the matter, opting to reserve its verdict. Questioning the grant of the reprieve, Justice Pardiwala asked defence counsel by saying, "Don't you think that the High Court has dictated an order of acquittal of seven accused while deciding bail petitions?"

On 17 July, the bench expressed its reservation over the High Court granting bail to the accused and said it was "not at all convinced" by the manner in which the discretionary power exercised.

Justice Pardiwala said, "We are not convinced with the manner in which the High Court has exercised discretion."

The court underlined the need to be convinced that there was "no good reason for this court to interfere".

The bench, however, expressed concern over the high court's approach, especially in handling the gravity of murder charge.

"We will not repeat the mistake of the High Court," Justice Pardiwala said.

Darshan, along with actress Pavithra Gowda and several others, is accused of abducting and torturing 33-year-old Renukaswamy, a fan who allegedly sent obscene messages to Pavithra. The police alleged the victim was held in a shed in Bengaluru for three days in June 2024, tortured and his body was recovered from a drain. *—PTI*

Surya calls for specialised transport cadre for cities

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya has called for the formation of a dedicated Urban Transport Cadre to address India's growing urban mobility crisis. Raising the issue under Rule 377 in the Lok Sabha, Surya said fragmented planning and a lack of domain experts have led to poor urban transport outcomes.

Surya said that of the 12,000 urban planning posts recommended by NITI Aayog, fewer than 4,000 are sanctioned—and many remain vacant. He pointed out that most urban local bodies function without trained planners, relying on general administrators or traffic police.

He has proposed creating an All India Service for Urban Transport Management, similar to the IAS or IPS, and urged the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to act as the nodal body for urban mobility guidelines.

Due to parliamentary disruptions, Surya was unable to speak in the House but submitted his intervention in writing.

With four Indian cities now ranked among the world's worst for traffic congestion, Surya emphasised that this issue deserves urgent national attention.

"This is not just about congestion—it's about the sustainability and productivity of Indian cities," Surya said.

—Salar News

CASTE CENSUS WILL DIVIDE SOCIETY: ASHOKA

BENGALURU, JULY 24

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka claimed that the caste census will create a divide among caste, as he blasted Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for announcing a new caste survey. He claimed that Siddaramaiah announced the survey to create a divide for political gains.

"If the Congress government plans to conduct another caste census, it means the previous one was fraudulent," he added.

Surveys conducted by the central government are widely accepted, whereas those conducted by the State government hold no value, he claimed.

DJ HALLI, KG HALLI CONVICTION A WIN

The NIA court on Wednesday convicted three among the 138 accused involved in the Kadugondana Halli (KG Halli) and DJ Halli police station attack case, and sentenced them to seven years of imprisonment.

Ashoka welcomed the punishment case, noting that the incident of an MLA's house being set on fire is still vivid. Many involved, including those associated with PFI and supporters of Pakistan, should face stringent punishment, he demanded. *—Salar News*

MB Patil asks Centre to decide on 2nd airport

BELAGAVI, 24 JULY

Minister for Infrastructure Development MB Patil on Thursday met Union Civil Aviation Minister K Ramamohan Naidu and pressed for key demands from the State, including finalising the location for Bengaluru's second international airport.

He also sought approval for the inauguration of the Vijayapura airport and urged the Centre to upgrade the Hubballi and Belagavi airports to international status.

Patil, who is in New Delhi, informed the Union Minister that an expert team from the Airports Authority of India (AAI) had already inspected three shortlisted sites for the proposed second international airport in Bengaluru, and their report is awaited, his office said in a statement.

Underscoring the importance of the Hubballi and Belagavi airports, the Minister said they have to be upgraded to international status. *—PTI*

Rajanna vows revolution in Sept

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna, who had earlier hinted at "revolutionary" political developments in the State post-September, reiterated on Thursday that he stands by his 26 June statement.

"It (revolutionary political developments) is ahead... I had said September. I still stand by that statement," Rajanna told press. When pressed for details, he said, "If I reveal everything now, there won't be any curiosity left. Let the curiosity remain."

Noting that Siddaramaiah has already clarified the issue of a leadership change, Rajanna, a supporter of the Chief Minister, said any discussion on the topic is irrelevant.

"Siddaramaiah has made it clear that he will abide by the high command's decision, so that rider is also there. Any decision on this will be taken at the high command level," he added.

Rajanna said he plans to meet AICC General Secretary in charge of Karnataka, Randeep Singh Surjewala, during his upcoming visit to Delhi.

"There's no specific reason. He is our in-charge secretary, so I will meet and discuss matters with him," he added. Rajanna was notable absent from Surjewala's meetings with ministers in State. *—PTI*

GREEN DEPLETION

'Neighbours can't graze livestock in State's forests'

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Eshwar B Khandre on Thursday said forest dwellers and tribal communities in Karnataka are allowed to graze their cattle in forest areas under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The restriction applies only to cattle brought in large numbers from neighbouring states for grazing inside forests, he said.

In a statement, Khandre said that in certain parts of the state, grazing cattle in the forest by local people has been a long-standing tradition.

The government plans to gradually phase this out by raising awareness among communities living on the fringes of forests and supporting them in cultivating green fodder on their own lands, he said.

According to Animal Husbandry Department data, approximately 33,000 cattle are currently being grazed in the Male Mahadeshwara Hills Wildlife Sanctuary alone.

The minister said grazing such large herds is depleting food and water sources for wild animals, such as elephants, bison, antelope and deer, besides increasing the risk of spreading infectious diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, lumpy skin disease and anthrax among wildlife.

In light of this, the government prohibited the grazing of cattle inside forests, but it has exempted local residents and those with grazing rights under the Forest Rights Act, the minister said.

In Chamarajanagar, the forest department has already used Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds to provide high-yield hybrid cows to around 15 farmers. Khandre said the goal is to gradually persuade people to use alternative options, thereby reducing dependence on forests.

He said thousands of cattle from Tamil Nadu and other states have been brought into Karnataka's forests. This has caused overgrazing and depletion of grasslands, hindrance to natural vegetation growth and a spike in human-wildlife conflicts, he said. *—PTI*

Don't teach Kannada to Marathis in Belagavi: MES

BELAGAVI, 24 JULY

MES-backed corporators are demanding documents in the Marathi language during the council meeting in Belagavi **PHOTO: PTI**

A delegation of pro-Maharashtrian organisation, Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) on Thursday met Minister in-charge of Belagavi, Satish Jarkiholi at his residence in Gokak town of the and submitted him a memorandum appealing not to make Kannada mandatory in 865 disputed places in the State to which Maharashtra has claimed its right and also exempt the Marathi staff in the Belagavi City Corporation from learning the language.

Kannada Development Authority chairman, Purushotam Bilimale had instructed the Urban Development Department to teach Kannada to the 2000 non-Kannadiga staff of the city corporation as they did not know the language.

Bilimale instructed corporation commissioner Shubha B to make arrangements to provide professors to teach Kannada to the non-Kannadigas within two months.

The MES also urged Jarkiholi not to make mandatory the writing of business sign boards in Kannada in disputed places in Karnataka. Providing 60 per cent of space to Kannada on business boards is mandatory.

Meanwhile, Kannada organisations claimed that though Akkalakot, Jat and Solapur in Maharashtra had many Kannadigas, only Marathi was used in business signboards there. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

No Marathi vs Hindi row: M'rashtra CM

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Amid a language war in Maharashtra, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis asserted on Thursday that language cannot be a means of discord and a Marathi person can never be narrow-minded on such issues. Addressing a function at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) here, he said the State government's policy has been Marathi along with other Indian languages. "Mother tongue is important. Every Marathi person is proud of the Marathi language. Insistence on Marathi is natural and justified, but we should also respect other Indian languages," he said. —*PTI*

YSRCP slams TDP's 'dictatorial rule' after convoy attack

TANUKU, 24 JULY

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader Karumuri Nageswara Rao has condemned the TDP-led government in Andhra Pradesh as a "dictatorial regime" following an attack on his convoy during a public campaign. Rao alleged that Jana Sena activists vandalised his vehicle near the Boys High School in Tanuku while he was promoting his "Babu Surety - Cheating Guarantee" programme. "If a former minister is not safe, what about ordinary citizens?" he questioned. Rao reported that the attackers tore down YSRCP posters and waved promotional materials for a film featuring Dy CM Pawan Kalyan. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CM Stalin underwent angio, recovering well

CHENNAI, 24 JULY

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin underwent an angiogram on Thursday after experiencing dizziness during his morning walk on 21 July. A medical bulletin from Apollo Hospitals confirmed that no blockages were found and the dizziness was due to minor variations in heartbeat. A corrective procedure was performed, and Stalin is said to be doing well. Senior DMK leader Duraimurugan stated that the Chief Minister is "absolutely fine" and will return to his routine in two days. While hospitalised, Stalin continued to carry out official duties, including reviewing the 'Ungaludan Stalin' campaign, which aims to deliver government services and address public grievances through neighbourhood camps. Doctors will decide the timing of his discharge. —*PTI*

BSF intercept 6 Pakistani drones in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, 24 JULY

Three pistols and over 1kg of heroin were seized after Border Security Force (BSF) personnel intercepted six Pakistani drones near the International Border in Punjab's Amritsar district, an official said on Thursday. BSF troopers neutralised five drones near the Modhe village in Amritsar on Wednesday night. They also seized four packets containing three pistols, as many magazines and a packet of heroin weighing 1.070kg, said the official. Early on Thursday, the BSF troops intercepted another drone near Attari village and recovered two magazines. In a separate operation, personnel of the force recovered pistol parts and a magazine from a paddy field near Dal village in Tarn Taran district. —*PTI*

India's 95% agri exports to UK to be duty free

FTA excludes dairy products, edible oils, apples, but includes turmeric &, pepper

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

India has successfully negotiated a free trade agreement (FTA) with the UK, significantly protecting domestic farmers while ensuring zero duties on 95 per cent of agricultural and processed food products. Key items such as dairy products, edible oils, and apples have been excluded from tariff concessions, thereby safeguarding local interests.

Signed on Thursday, the FTA also marks the exclusion of oats from tariff reductions, but it paves the way for Indian staples such as turmeric, pepper, cardamom, and processed food items like mango pulp and pickles to enter the UK market duty-free.

Marine products, including shrimp and tuna, will also benefit from the elimination of duties, representing a potential boost in India's agricultural exports by 20 per cent over the next three years.

A commerce ministry official highlighted that the food processing sector stands to gain immensely, with previously high duties of up to 70 per cent now reduced to zero on 99.7 per cent of tariff lines.

Exports of high-margin products such as coffee, beverages, and artisanal foods will also be facilitated, enhancing India's competitiveness in the UK market.

Despite the UK's substantial agricultural imports valued at USD 37.52 billion, India's current share stands at just USD 811 million, indicating vast untapped potential.

The FTA offers favourable conditions for emerging products like jackfruits, millets, and organic herbs, while marine exports can expect zero duties on 99 per cent of products, opening more doors in UK's market.

This trade agreement is poised to benefit farmers across diverse Indian states, including Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and the Northeast, as they gain access to high-value international markets.

The FTA is expected to significantly contribute to India's goal of achieving USD 100 billion in agricultural exports by 2030. — *PTI*

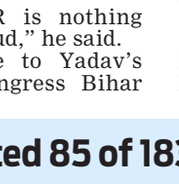
Prime Minister Narendra Modi met King Charles III at Sandringham House on Thursday. Under Modi's 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' initiative, which encourages people to plant a tree in tribute to their mothers, Modi gifted the King a sapling of Sonoma dove tree or handkerchief tree **PHOTO: PTI**

- Exports of high-margin products such as coffee, beverages, and artisanal foods will also be facilitated, enhancing India's competitiveness in the UK market.

FTA KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Duty-free access for 99 per cent of Indian exports.
- Duty-free exports on 95 per cent of agricultural products. Zero duty on 99% of marine exports. Seafood shrimp, tuna, fishmeal are duty-free.

- The UK will cut tariffs on clothes, footwear and food from India.
- Medical devices such as surgical instruments, diagnostic equipment, ECG & X-Ray machines will not attract any duty.



- India to import more whiskey, gin, cosmetics, cars from UK.

- Pharma, engineering goods, electronics, food processing, toys and plastics to benefit.
- MSMEs can now bid for UK govt contracts.
- 75,000 Indians working in the UK don't have to pay for social security for 3 years.
- Indian firms and freelancers can work in 36 service sectors with no Economic Needs Test.
- British cars such as Aston Martin, Bentley, McLaren & Land Rover to get cheaper.

REASONS FOR SIR

Can't allow dead people on voters' list, says EC

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Facing flak over voter roll revision in Bihar, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Thursday asked if the poll body can come under influence and allow the dead, those who have migrated permanently or have registered themselves as electors at multiple places be included in the voters' list.

His remarks came amid stepped up attacks by the Opposition parties, which have been targeting the poll authority over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's electoral roll.

The Opposition has claimed that the move will disenfranchise crores of eligible citizens.

"Isn't a pure voter list being prepared by the Election Commission through a transparent process, the foundation for fair elections and a strong democracy?" he said, according to the EC.

He said allowing ineligible people to vote, first in Bihar and later in the entire country, is against the Constitution.

"On these questions, someday or the other, all of us and all the citizens of India will have to think deeply, going beyond political ideologies," he underlined.

During house-to-house visit in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral roll in Bihar, poll officials have so far found that more than 52 lakh voters were not present at their addresses and another 18 lakh have died. — *PTI*

Amit Shah doesn't trust Nitish: Tejashwi vows poll boycott

PATNA, 24 JULY

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's claim in the Parliament on Thursday that, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar no longer enjoyed the trust of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, resulted in a heated duel between MPs of the ruling and Opposition parties.

"What is the reason behind Shah losing his trust in Kumar? He keeps saying that the upcoming Assembly Polls will be fought under the JD(U) president's leadership, but time will tell who would be the chief minister," Yadav said.

Talking about the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral polls underway in Bihar, Tejashwi also said that his party was keeping the "option open" to boycott the upcoming polls in the wake of the controversy.

"What is happening in the name of SIR is nothing short of a fraud," he said.

In response to Yadav's remarks, Congress Bihar in-charge Krishna Allavaru stated that the party opposes the SIR process, labelling it a "Tughlaqi process" that undermines democracy.

He affirmed that the INDIA alliance would collectively decide on how to address the situation, with "all options" remaining open.

Allavaru also challenged the Chief Election Commissioner to verify the process by selecting 1,000 individuals at random in each Asembly segment, while asserting that the current electoral exercise is an attempt to "steal elections and votes."

Both the alliance parties have been opposing SIR, including alleging collusion between the ruling BJP led alliance and the EC. —*PTI*

Leader of Opposition in Bihar Assembly and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav addresses the media during the Monsoon session of the Assembly, in Patna, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

'Secularism' to stay in Constitution

The government has confirmed it has "no current plan or intention" to remove 'socialism' and 'secularism' from the Constitution's Preamble, introduced during the Emergency period. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal stated no formal legal processes have been initiated for any amendments. The Supreme Court upheld the terms in a November 2024 ruling, emphasising their importance to the Constitution's structure.

AI reported 85 of 183 airline snags

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Five Indian airlines reported 183 technical defects in their aircraft to the aviation regulator DGCA this year till 21 July, including 85 by Air India Group, a government report said on Thursday. IndiGo and Akasa Air reported 62 and 28 technical defects, respectively, while SpiceJet reported 8, it said. —PTI

TMC activist hacked to death in West Bengal

KOLKATA, 24 JULY

A Trinamool Congress (TMC) activist, Sasthi Ghosh, was allegedly murdered in Bharatpur, Murshidabad district, on Wednesday night.

According to police, Ghosh was returning home when he was assaulted by unidentified assailants armed with a sharp object. He succumbed to his injuries and was declared dead upon arrival at a local hospital.

While motives remain unclear, officials suggest the murder may stem from personal enmity related to property disputes.

Ghosh's family claims his TMC affiliation was a factor in the crime. The incident prompted accusations from the opposition BJP and Congress, who alleged that infighting within TMC contributed to the violence.

BJP leader Dilip Ghosh suggested this incident highlights a growing rift among TMC members, while former Congress MP Adhir Chowdhury accused party members of being responsible for Ghosh's death. TMC MLA Humayun Kabir, however, dismissed suggestions of political motives, attributing the incident to local conflicts. M

eanwhile, another murder took place in Madhusudanpur, Kakdwip, where the nephew of a panchayat member was found dead. —*PTI*

Now, BJP wants SIR in Bengal

SILIGURI, 24 JULY

Suvendu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition in West Bengal's Assembly, has called for a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls to eliminate illegal voters, following similar actions in Bihar. Addressing a rally after a protest against violence against women, he asserted that Hindus migrating from Bangladesh due to persecution need not fear.

However, he emphasised that illegal Muslim immigrants should not be allowed to appear on the rolls. Adhikari's comments coincide with rising tension over allegations that the SIR in Bihar favours the ruling NDA, claims the Election Commission has denied.

He also spotlighted joblessness in West Bengal, citing 2.15 crore unemployed individuals, and questioned the state government's claims of providing sufficient employment, noting the exodus of 60 lakh migrant workers. Concurrently, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, confidently predicted her party would secure more seats in the 2026 Assembly elections.

Adhikari challenged her assertion, predicting her departure from office, and raised concerns over women's safety in light of recent violent incidents against women in the state. —*PTI*

MNS' protest forces Gujarati plaque removal

THANE, 21 JULY

Workers of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), along with members of other political parties, forced the removal of a Gujarati-language plaque outside the office of Gujarat BJP MLA Virendrasinh Bahadursinh Jadeja in Seawoods, Navi Mumbai, on Monday.

Jadeja represents the Rapar constituency in Gujarat. The MNS had issued an ultimatum last week demanding the sign's removal, citing disrespect to Marathi identity. A protest march, led by MNS Navi Mumbai Secretary Sachin Kadam and supported by leaders from Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress, and the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction), was held at the NRI Sagari police station.

Police Inspector Sunil Kadam assured the group that the board would be taken down. Subsequently, under police supervision, MNS supporters proceeded to the office and removed the plaque. A BJP worker publicly apologised and promised to replace it with a Marathi sign. MNS later confirmed the removal and apology in an official statement. —*PTI*

MNS workers force removal of Gujarati display board at BJP MLA's office in Mumbai **PHOTO: PTI**

PUT AMERICA FIRST

No more hiring Indian and Chinese workers: Trump

NEW YORK, 24 JULY

US President Donald Trump has declared that American tech companies must cease their practice of establishing factories in China and hiring workers in India, asserting that such practices are "over" under his leadership.

Speaking at the AI Summit, where he signed three executive orders focused on Artificial Intelligence, Trump accused the tech industry of pursuing "radical globalism," which he claims has left millions of Americans feeling betrayed.

"Many of our largest tech companies have benefited from American freedoms while building factories abroad and neglecting their responsibilities at home," he stated.

He emphasised the necessity for a "new spirit of patriotism and national loyalty" in Silicon Valley, insisting that US technology firms ought to "put America first."

The executive orders include a national action plan to enhance the American AI sector and promote the export of technology packages. —*PTI*

Trump insisted on a new spirit of 'patriotism and loyalty' that puts America first **PHOTO: PTI**

Border talks with India candid: China

BEIJING, 24 JULY

Diplomatic discussions regarding the border situation between China and India took place in New Delhi on Wednesday, with both sides describing the talks as "candid."

The discussions were conducted under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) framework for border affairs.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a press release highlighting the productive nature of the conversation, stating, "The two sides focused on in-depth communication regarding the implementation of the outcomes of the 23rd meeting of Special Representatives (SRs) for the China-India Boundary Question and agreed to jointly prepare for the 24th meeting."

Following the WMCC talks, India's Ministry of External Affairs expressed satisfaction with the current state of peace and tranquillity in the border areas, noting that this contributes to the gradual normalisation of bilateral relations. The meetings also laid the groundwork for the upcoming Special Representative talks, which are scheduled to take place in India later this year. —*PTI*

- India's Ministry of External Affairs expressed satisfaction with the current state of peace and tranquillity in the border areas, noting that this contributes to the gradual normalisation of bilateral relations.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

US comedian Kevin Hart to perform in Mumbai on 21 Sept

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

American actor-comedian Kevin Hart will make his India debut in Mumbai on 21 September as part of his stand-up tour 'Acting My Age', District by Zomato said on Thursday. The announcement comes months after Hart's performance in New Delhi on 30 April was cancelled in the wake of the terror attack in Pahalgam. In Mumbai, Hart will perform at the NSCI Dome SVP Stadium. "India, we are destined to meet this year. We're going to have an epic night filled with love and laughter!" Hart said in a statement. District by Zomato CEO Rahul Ganjoo called Hart's arrival a "monumental moment" for Indian comedy lovers. *—PTI*

2 Assam officials held for abetting suicide of junior

BONGAIGAON, 24 JULY

Two senior Assam government officials have been arrested for alleged abetment of suicide of a junior. A woman assistant engineer of the Public Works Department (PWD), hailing from Guwahati and posted in Bongaigaon, was found dead at her apartment on 22 July. She had allegedly named the duo in a suicide note, claiming that she was facing extreme stress at her workplace. The two government officials have been arrested. One is an executive engineer of the PWD and the other a sub-divisional officer. Both of them were transferred earlier this month. While the executive engineer was posted in Nalbari, the SDO was moved to Kamrup. *—PTI*

Ketamine worth Rs 88.92 cr seized in Raigad; 4 held

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

Raigad, Maharashtra Police have seized ketamine valued at approximately Rs 88.92 crore (£8.4 million) from an illegal drug manufacturing unit in Jite village, Mahad MIDC, Raigad district. Acting on a tip-off, local authorities, with support from Mumbai Police's Anti-Narcotics Cell, raided the facility on Wednesday. Four suspects Machhindra Bhosle, Sushant Patil, Shubham Sutar, and Rohan Gawas were arrested for allegedly producing the controlled substance. Ketamine, a medical anaesthetic with hallucinogenic effects, is often misused as a recreational drug. A case has been filed under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Police are investigating potential supply networks and criminal links. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

8 killed, 21 injured as bus veers off road in HP

MANDI, 24 JULY

A state-run bus veered off a steep mountain road at Tarangl in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi and plunged 100 feet in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district, killing eight people. The bus carrying 29 people were on its way to Durgapur from Sarkaghat. 21 injured people are undergoing treatment in different hospitals. The cause of the accident is yet to be ascertained. Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri who also holds the portfolio of transport department met the injured in AIIMS Bilapsur. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu directed the Mandi district administration to provide ex-gratia grant to the next of kin of the deceased and best of treatment to the injured. *—PTI*

Fear grips Gurugram amid 'illegal immigrants' check

Bengali speaking people from Assam, WB among 250 held

GURUGRAM, 24 JULY

Anju Khatun, who says she is from West Bengal, was visibly terrified while recounting the ordeal she faced earlier this week while frantically searching for her husband at the holding centres set up by the Gurugram police for illegal immigrants.

Several Bengali-speaking people are petrified by the police's ongoing drive to identify illegal immigrants. Many claim that Bengali-speaking people were being targeted.

Over 250 suspected people were sent to the holding areas, where their documents were being verified.

The police dismissed reports that migrant workers from West Bengal and Assam were being targeted and detained.

Sanitation workers, most of who are Bengali, stopped showing up for work for fear of ending up at the detention centre.

"My husband had gone to clean cars at a residential society when the police took him to a holding centre," said Khatun, who hails from West Bengal and have been living here for the past five years.

Police check documents of suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants living in slum areas in Gurugram in Haryana PHOTO: PTI

Her husband was let out only after she produced their Aadhaar cards and other documents before the police.

Over 20 people from Assam's Dhubri were kept in the community centre for five days before being released on 23 July.

Meanwhile, eight illegal immigrants, suspected to be from Bangladesh, were identified.

- Several Bengali-speaking people are petrified by the police's ongoing drive to identify illegal immigrants. Over 250 were sent to the holding areas, where their documents were being verified.

Holding areas were set up at community centres in Badshahpur, Sector 10A, Sector 40 and Sector 1 in Manesar. Naib tehsildars were put in charge of these centres equipped with basic necessities, including medical facilities.

Police said that only those found overstaying, illegally staying or lacking valid documents are deported.

The details of suspected person were being sent to the district magistrate or the deputy commissioner in the state concerned for verification. *—PTI*

Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority carries out a demolition drive against the illegal settlers PHOTO: PTI

SC to hear on Assam violating demolition rules

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine a plea seeking contempt action against Assam government authorities for allegedly violating the top court directives during its demolition exercise in Goalpara district.

The court issued notice to the Assam chief secretary and others for their responses within two weeks.

The plea alleged mass eviction and demolition drives in June affected over 667 families living on the land for 60-70 years.

The petition, filed by eight residents of Goalpara district, said a notice of only two days was given and the demolition carried out immediately without granting personal hearing and providing adequate time for appeal or judicial review.

After the apex court said it would issue notice on the plea, Hegde requested for a status quo.

The plea referred to the top court's earlier verdict which laid down pan-India guidelines and barred demolition of properties without a prior showcause notice and 15 days' time to the aggrieved party to respond. *—PTI*

ED raids Chandigarh's 'fake' call centres for duping foreigners

CHANDIGARH, 24 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate raided some call centres located in and around Chandigarh which were allegedly cheating foreigners in the guise of providing technical support services and were laundering funds worth crores of rupees, sources said on Thursday.

The searches were launched on Wednesday night in Chandigarh and adjoining cities of Mohali in Punjab and Panchkula in Haryana under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, they said.

These call centres were allegedly cheating foreigners in the guise of providing non-existent tech support services. It was found that the companies operating these call centres had counterpart companies abroad to receive "fraudulent" funds through various payment gateways, which were then remitted to India through banking channels as well as hawala, a source said.

- The searches were launched on Wednesday night in Chandigarh and Mohali in Punjab and Panchkula in Haryana under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

According to the websites of these companies, they provide software support services like web designing and fixed wireless internet services, etc.

The details of their promoters, directors or team members were not mentioned, the ED found.

Some of them have posted pictures of big IT parks on their websites, which is contrary to reality, the sources said. *—PTI*

Ganesh idols to be immersed in 6-feet tanks

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

The Bombay High Court on Thursday ordered immersion of all idols of deities up to six feet height in artificial tanks during the 10-day Ganesh festival beginning on 27 August. The order will be effective till March next year for the festivals that require immersion of idols of deities, including those made of Plaster of Paris (PoP).

"The court has to make an endeavour that the impact of immersion of idols is bare minimum on the environment. Therefore, idols up to 6 feet should compulsorily be immersed in artificial water tanks," the court said. *—PTI*

India calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, 24 JULY

Voicing concern over the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, India has called for an immediate ceasefire, stating that "intermittent pauses in hostilities" are insufficient to address the scale of suffering.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, told a UN Security Council debate that the people of Gaza continue to endure acute shortages of food, fuel, medical aid, and education. "There is no substitute for peace. A ceasefire must be put in place. All hostages must be released. Dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable path," he said.He stressed India's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and expressed hope that the upcoming international conference on the Israel-Palestine conflict (28–30 July) would lead to concrete steps towards a two-State solution.

India's permanent representative to UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said that a ceasefire must be put in place immediately PHOTO: PTI

Harish noted that 95 per cent of Gaza's hospitals are damaged or destroyed, and over 650,000 children have had no access to schooling for 20 months.

India reaffirmed its commitment to a sovereign, independent Palestinian state coexisting peacefully with Israel. It also highlighted its ongoing development projects in Palestine worth over USD 40 million. *—PTI*

SC to hear WB's plea on staying of OBC list

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to hear on 28 July a plea of West Bengal government against the Calcutta High Court decision staying the new list of other backward classes (OBCs).

A writ petition was filed before the high court challenging the new list, asking for the state to legislate, which was in contradiction to previous rulings.

The court said it was held right from the Mandal Commission verdict that the executive could identify the OBCs.

Sibal said a contempt petition was filed in the high court and urged the proceedings to be stayed as no contempt was made.

The state government in a separate plea, challenged the order and later submitted before the high court that it would conduct identification of OBCs. *—PTI*

No to plea on Bhopal gas tragedy victims

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea claiming that several seriously injured survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy were under-compensated because they were "misclassified" as having temporary disablement or minor injuries. The court gave the petitioner organisations the liberty to approach the jurisdictional high court. They sought directions to the Centre and Madhya Pradesh government to compensate them. *—PTI*

TEACHER GETS BAIL OVER 'CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIP' WITH STUDENT

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

A Mumbai special court has granted bail to a 40-year-old school teacher accused of repeatedly sexually assaulting a minor male student, deeming the relationship to be "consensual."

The court noted that the victim is over 16 years old and evidence suggested mutual consent. The teacher's resignation from the school diminished any influence she had over the student.

The teacher, who claimed the allegations were fabricated by the boy's mother, highlighted her role as a mother to 11-year-old twins, one of whom has health issues. The judge determined that continued custody was unnecessary, releasing him on a bond of Rs 50,000 with sureties. *—PTI*

DGCA serves show cause notice to AI

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued four show cause notices to Air India for multiple violations concerning cabin crew rest and duty regulations, training protocols, and operational procedures. This action follows the airline's voluntary disclosures made to the regulator on 20 and 21 June.

The notices, dispatched on 23 July, highlight breaches related to cabin crew duty and rest norms linked to four ultra-long-haul flights operated in April and May. Additionally, they raise concerns over crew training and operational procedures pertaining to flights conducted in late 2024 and early 2025.

Air India acknowledged the receipt of the notices and stated they would respond within the stipulated timeframe, reaffirming their commitment to the safety of their crew and passengers.

"We acknowledge receipt of these notices from the regulator related to certain voluntary disclosures that were made over the last one year by Air India. We will respond to the said notices within the stipulated period," an Air India spokesperson said.

One particular notice focuses on violations concerning flight duty periods and weekly rest for flights from June 2024 and June 2025. Air India has recently faced increased scrutiny from regulators over these issues, in light of the incident on 12 June, when a Boeing 787-8 aircraft crashed after takeoff in Ahmedabad. *—PTI*

GETS DEATH SENTENCE

Man kills mom for Rs 32 lakh FD

SHEOPOR, 24 JULY

A trial court in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur has sentenced a man to death for murdering a woman who had adopted him and concealing the body in a wall to usurp her fixed deposit of Rs 32 lakh.

Revered as an equal to God, a mother's murder is inexcusable, the court observed in its order on 23 July.

The court pronounced the death penalty to Deepak Pachauri, 26, a resident of Railway Colony in Sheopur district, after finding him guilty under for the murder of his mother Usha Devi in 2024.

Deepak filed a missing person complaint with the police in May, 2024. However, inconsistencies in his statements raised suspicion. He later confessed to the murder.

He was adopted about 20 years back by Usha Devi and her husband Bhuvendra Pachauri from an orphanage in Gwalior.

After his father's death in 2021, Deepak withdrew Rs 16.85 lakh from his father's fixed deposits. He invested Rs 14 lakh in the stock market and spent the rest. He targeted his mother's FD of Rs 32 lakh, with him being the sole nominee. When Usha Devi refused to give him money, he struck her with an iron rod and strangled her. He conceale the body inside a wall beneath a staircase toilet. *—PTI*

The accused Deepak Pachauri being produced in a trial court in Madhya Pradesh' Sheopur PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

HC reduces death penalty to life term for accused

KOLKATA, 24 JULY

The Calcutta High Court has commuted the death sentences of Fagun Mandi and Rabindra Routh to life imprisonment without remission for 60 years.

The two were convicted of the gangrape and murder of a five-year-old girl in Jhargram, West Bengal.

The court upheld their conviction, citing sufficient evidence of aggravated sexual assault and murder, but noted their socio-economic background and a state report indicating potential for reform. Terming the case as "rarest of rare," the trial court awarded the death penalty. The High Court ruled that a non-remittable life sentence would serve justice without resorting to capital punishment. *—PTI*

Kolkata gangrape: Gait test of accused done

KOLKATA, 24 JULY

Police have conducted gait recognition analysis on the four accused persons arrested in the Kasba gangrape case involving a student inside the South Calcutta Law College premises, a senior officer said on Thursday.

The analysis was initiated on Wednesday inside the correctional home where the four – Monojit Mishra, Pramit Mukherjee, Zaib Ahmed and security guard Pinaki Banerjee – are lodged. A local court had granted permission for the exercise on Tuesday.

"The test is basically observing and analysing their walking pattern. The findings will be compared with CCTV footage and other video evidence recovered from the college premises on that day," the officer said.

Investigators also received the forensic analysis reports of the mobile phones seized from the accused, he added.

"These devices were allegedly used to record the crime that took place inside the guard's room," the office said, adding that the service providers have submitted to them the call lists. *—PTI*

KARKIDAKA VAVU BALI

Thousands of people from the Hindu community performed the Bali tharpanam ritual, and paid homage to their ancestors at various temples in Kerala during Karkidakam month. Karkidakam is the last month of Malayalam calendar and is also known as Ramayana month, which is from 17 July till 16 August. According to Hindu belief, departed souls attain 'moksha' (liberation) if the ritual is performed on Karkidaka Vavu

PHOTO: PTI

B'luru scientists capture mini plasma loops on Sun

Scientists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) in Bengaluru have managed to peek into one of the fleeting windows to the Sun – miniature plasma loops in the lower layers of the Sun's atmosphere – securing another piece of clue that helps in understanding its mysteries better.

The "breakthrough" reveals the dazzling world of miniature plasma loops, or tiny loops, which stretch almost as long as the distance between Kashmir and Kanyakumari, Tanmoy Samanta, a faculty member at IIA and a co-author of the study, told PTI.

His colleague and co-author Jayant Joshi said IIA's work has led to substantial progress in the study of miniature plasma loops.

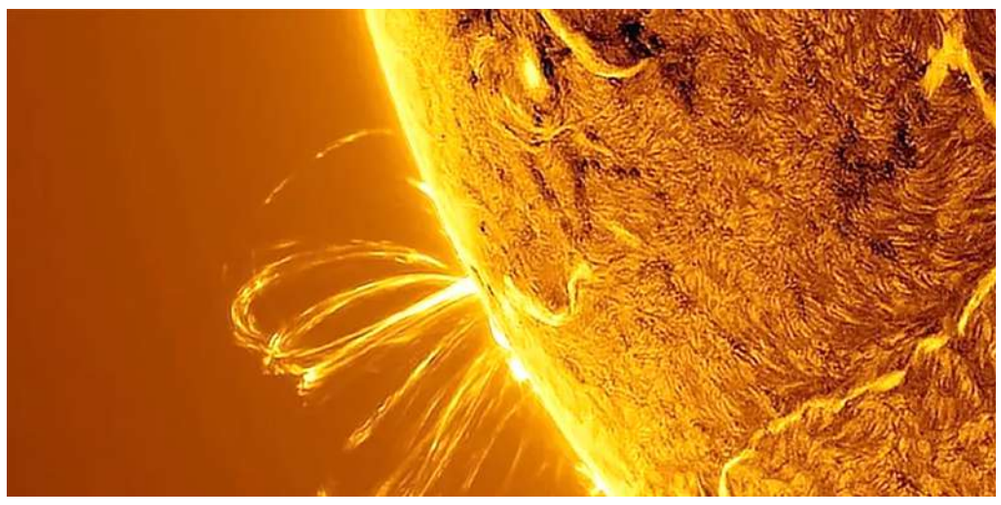
"About half-a-decade ago, scientists discovered the existence of miniature plasma loops. But, unlike coronal loops, which are large and therefore can be observed with small telescopes, accessing tiny loops is not easy," Joshi told PTI.

Among the most intriguing features of the Sun's outer layer are coronal loops, arc-like beautiful structures of hot plasma that glow at a temperature over a million degrees, Samanta said.

"And these large loops in the solar corona, or outer atmosphere, have long been studied by scientists," he added.

According to Joshi, the sighting of their miniature counterparts has not been consistent as ground-based telescopes are limited and depend on sky conditions. "IIA's latest work offers a little more depth to our understanding of tiny loops," he added.

Annu Bura, who is pursuing her PhD at IIA and the first author of the paper published on the result, said she started the project to build the skills necessary for her future research. "I was new to the field and wanted to understand how to work with observational data, particularly using both ground-based and space-based instruments. It was my first project, and I saw it as a way to get hands-on experience with real solar data," Bura told PTI.



The breakthrough reveals the dazzling world of miniature plasma loops, or tiny loops, which stretch almost as long as the distance between Kashmir and Kanyakumari, Tanmoy Samanta, a co-author of the study said ***PHOTO: PTI***

It was also part of her broader PhD objective, she said.

"I wanted to study the dynamics of small-scale explosive features in the solar atmosphere using high-resolution observations," she added.

While exploring data from the Goode Solar Telescope at the Big Bear Solar Observatory in the USA – a ground-based telescope known for its excellent spatial resolution, Bura said they came across a very bright loop in the H-alpha line.

The H-alpha spectral line from Hydrogen atoms, added Bura, is a key line for probing the solar chromosphere, which is just above the visible surface of the Sun.

The team found that in the redder or longer wavelength part of this line, these loops appear as bright, delicate arcs similar to coronal loops and these were seen very clearly for the first time.

"Such a clearly visible loop in H-alpha is quite unusual, which immediately caught our attention," she added.

To understand the structure better, Bura said she searched for coordinated observations from space-based instruments.

"We found coordinated data from the Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) and the Interface Region Imaging Spectrograph (IRIS) both NASA missions focused on studying the Sun," she added.

With the availability of this multi-instrument, multi-wavelength coverage, it became possible for the team to study the loop in much greater detail, across different layers of the solar atmosphere.

"Our multi-instrument observation allowed us to analyse the loops not only in visible light but also in ultraviolet and extreme-ultraviolet wavelength, revealing their behaviour across the chromosphere, transition region and corona, the different layers of the Sun's atmosphere," said Bura. They also found that although these tiny loops can be about 3,000 km to 4,000 km long, they have a width of less than 100 km.

"And these tiny loops live fast and die young, lasting only a few minutes, making it extremely difficult to observe them and interpret their physical origins," added Bura.

However, Bura said these loops punch above their weight when it comes to understanding the Sun.

"They offer a new window into how magnetic energy is stored and released in the solar atmosphere on small scales," she pointed out.

The study also unearthed "mysteries" providing fodder for future research.

For instance, when they studied the plasma temperature inside these loops, it was found to be soaring above several million degrees – hot enough to shine in the extreme ultraviolet, visible in SDO's Atmospheric Imaging Assembly.

"This behaviour is puzzling as the loops have a height of around 1 million metres and lie within the chromosphere, where plasma densities are much higher than the corona. It is quite difficult to heat the plasma to such a hot temperature," said Joshi. He added, "future spectroscopic observation can help us to understand this puzzling behaviour."

Future telescopes with even sharper chromospheric imagers and more sensitive magnetic field measurements – such as India's proposed 2-meter aperture National Large Solar Telescope (NLST), planned near Pangong Lake in Ladakh – could help unlock even more secrets hidden within these small-scale solar features, the team conclude in their study.

The study was published in 'The Astrophysical Journal'. *—PTI*

SALAR

Here's what to know about Thailand, Cambodia dispute

Armed clashes broke out Thursday between Thailand and Cambodia in long-disputed border areas, rapidly escalating months-long tensions.

The fighting included gunfire exchanges and shelling and rocket fire, which Thai authorities said killed at least nine Thai civilians and injured 14 others in three provinces. Thailand responded with air strikes.

It was the second armed confrontation since a Cambodian soldier was shot dead in May and a major escalation that came hours after the two countries downgraded diplomatic relations following a land mine explosion that injured Thai soldiers.

Clashes are ongoing in at least six areas along the border, the Thai Defence Ministry said. The first clash Thursday morning happened in an area near the ancient Ta Muen Thom temple along the border of Surin and Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province.

Here's what to know about the dispute between the two Southeast Asian neighbours.

The dispute flared in May after armed forces of Thailand and Cambodia briefly fired at each other in a relatively small, contested border area that each country claims as its own.

Both sides said they acted in self-defence. One Cambodian soldier was killed.

While the countries said afterwards they agreed to de-escalate the situation, Cambodian and Thai authorities continued to implement or threaten measures short of armed force, keeping tensions high.

Thailand added tight restrictions at the border with Cambodia that stopped almost all crossings except for students, medical patients and others with essential needs. On Thursday, Thai authorities announced they were sealing the border entirely.

Cambodia also banned Thai movies and TV shows, stopped the import of Thai fuel, fruits and vegetables and boycotted some of its neighbour's international internet links and power supply.

Fighting sparks political turmoil in Thailand. Nationalist passions on both sides have inflamed the situation.

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was suspended from office July 1 to be investigated for possible ethics violations over her handling of the border dispute following a leaked phone call with a senior Cambodian leader.

In the June call, Paetongtarn referred to Cambodian former Prime Minister Hun Sen as "uncle" and criticised Thai military leadership, remarks framed by critics as disrespectful to national sovereignty.

Hun Sen was succeeded by his son Hun Manet in 2023 but remains influential as Senate president. He was a longtime friend of her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, a popular but divisive former prime minister, but they became estranged over the border dispute.

The leaked call sparked widespread outrage and protests. Paetongtarn's Pheu Thai party-led coalition also weakened when its second-largest partner, the Bhumjaithai Party, withdrew support, citing her perceived softness toward Cambodia.

Paetongtarn has apologised and argued her comments were a negotiating tactic. Her ally, former Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai, was appointed acting prime minister.

Border claims cause periodic tensions.

Border disputes are long-standing issues that have caused periodic tensions between the two neighbours. Thailand and Cambodia share more than 800 kilometres of land border.

The contesting claims stem largely from a 1907 map drawn under French colonial rule that was used to separate Cambodia from Thailand. Cambodia has been using the map as a reference to claim territory, while Thailand has argued the map is inaccurate.

The most prominent and violent conflicts have been around the 1,000-year-old Preah Vihear temple.

In 1962, the International Court of Justice awarded sovereignty over the temple area to Cambodia. The ruling became a major irritant in bilateral relations.

Cambodia went back to the court in 2011, following several clashes between its army and Thai forces that killed about 20 people and displaced thousands. The court reaffirmed the ruling in Cambodia's favour in 2013.

Cambodia has again turned to the international court to resolve the border disputes but Thailand has rejected the court's jurisdiction. *—PTI*

The dispute flared in May after armed forces of Thailand and Cambodia briefly fired at each other in a relatively small, contested border area that each country claims as its own ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Guess what 400 signatures could get you in Bengaluru? A bus

There is a story behind Metro Feeder Bus 314A/1, launched on July 19 by Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) to serve the residents of Kaggadasapura and CV Raman Nagar. And the moral of the story too: when people get together, they can get things done.

It took 400 signatures from citizens concerned and three months of hustling the power that be before the long-awaited bus materialised.

The feeder bus, apart from serving residents, is also expected to benefit those working in Bagmane Tech Park as well as the employees of the Defence Research and Development Organistaion (DRDO) office in Kaggadasapura.

The campaign started in 2024, said Shachi Pathak, a resident of Kaggadasapura who led the campaign.

"To get that 400 signatures was not easy, but it was easier than my first civic campaign to rejuvenate Kaggadasapura lake. Now, I understand how to go about these things: persuasion is the key," said Pathak to PTI.

Pathak, who has been active in civic volunteering space since 2022, knows how the system works, agreed Srinivas Alavilli, Senior Fellow at WRI India, who works on creating sustainable transport solutions.

"She understood the route needs, mobilised her neighbours and apartment associations. Collected 400 signatures and then submitted a formal petition to BMTC in person," he added.

A software engineer, who had to quit her job for personal reasons, Pathak said she now runs a firm that provides resume writing consultation.

Pathak, 44, moved to Bengaluru from Varanasi after her marriage in 2006.

"Initially, I started by volunteering to manage social media groups of residents from CV Raman Nagar and KR Puram constituencies. It didn't take me long to realise that there is a huge gap between people having issues and authority taking action. To bridge this gap, we need more active citizens," she added.

Pathak recalled how when she finally stood up for Kaggadasapura lake, she stood alone as no one really knew her.

"It was also a lonely battle, because people had by then given up. I was not the first one to talk about it. But I still surveyed and collected feedback from hundreds of residents and submitted it to the Chief Commissioner and MLAs," said Pathak.

It took 400 signatures from citizens concerned and three months of hustling the power that be before the long-awaited bus materialised ***PHOTO: PTI***

The success of that project and her conviction had people rallying behind her for the subsequent campaigns.

Around October 2023, Pathak said she joined the group of people who were pushing for the first feeder bus for the area.

"The first bus came easily enough, in just a month, but one feeder bus service was not enough to cover the whole area, so our neighbourhood got left out," said Pathak.

The next phase of their campaign faced delays, she added.

"BMTC was slow to act on some of our suggestions, and key routes like Kaggadasapura Main Road remained unaddressed. Additionally, damaged roads forced us to pause efforts for a while. After the Lok Sabha elections in mid-2024, we revived the campaign with renewed energy," she said.

Over the years of dealing with authorities, Pathak said she understood the power of people getting together.

"One person does not matter to the authorities. The more people, the better it is for the campaign. Also, persuasion is a continuous process. So, I realised that it is very important to keep people engaged and to build a community," said Pathak.

This is where X, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp, came to her help, said Pathak. Through various groups, she and other volunteers cater to the social needs of her neighbourhood.

"We help residents to connect with each other to get information or advice on education, real estate, reselling of old items, or even pursue their hobbies. We also have a group for Kannada learning. Many women entrepreneurs are benefitting from these groups," said Pathak.

Another citizen group that is leveraging social media to build a community is the popular HSR Citizen Forum, whose sustainable living campaigns often go viral.

Incidentally, the first successful feeder bus service was introduced in HSR Layout in August 2023.

Shashidhara K, a member of HSR Citizen Forum, said because they were selected by Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT)'s Sustainable Mobility Accords (SuMA) Initiative, due to their proactive citizen initiatives, they could plan the route and stops, based on the feedback from residents, making the service most effective in Bengaluru.

"We planned this over three years with DULT. We had bus stops at every 300 m, about 18 of them, and situated in such a way that either direction commuters would have access to a bus every 5 to 8 minutes," said Shasidhara.

But where HSR Citizen Forum really won is in its relentless outreach efforts. The campaign that lasted three months ingrained the idea of using feeder buses that they run full almost at any time, said Shanthi Tummala, an active member of the citizen forum, to PTI.

People, irrespective of their social standing, have developed the habit of jumping into them instead of taking their private vehicles, she added.

Tummala said BMTC had introduced feeder buses twice before in HSR Layout and had to phase them out as they didn't get expected traction.

"This time, we decided to involve citizens even during the planning stage. We put out route maps at every place possible. We literally drove into every resident's head about the availability of service, timings and the route. It has paid off now," said Tummala. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Macron sues Candace Owens for calling wife a man

PARIS, 24 JULY

France's first couple, President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte, are suing US conservative influencer Candace Owens for defamation over claims that Brigitte is a man. Their lawyer, Tom Clare, stated that the defamation suit was filed in a Delaware court, marking a "last resort" after a year of unsuccessful attempts to engage with Owens. Clare emphasised that there was "extensive evidence" confirming Brigitte's identity as a woman. He reiterated the couple's frustrations over Owens' responses, which included mockery. "Enough is enough; it was time to hold her accountable," Clare declared. Should Owens persist with her claims, the couple is seeking "substantial" damages at trial. *—PTI*

Syria and Saudi Arabia sign $6B investment deals

DAMASCUS, 24 JULY

Syria and Saudi Arabia announced on 24th July 2025 that they have signed 47 investment agreements worth more than USD 6 billion during the Syrian-Saudi Investment Forum in Damascus. The agreements span diverse sectors, including real estate, telecommunications, and finance, with projects focused on housing, the reconstruction of war-affected areas, tourism, and the establishment of three new cement factories. Syrian minister Hamza al-Mustafa stated that these deals are anticipated to generate approximately 50,000 direct jobs and 150,000 indirect jobs. The Saudi investments come amidst increasing tensions in Syria, particularly following violence in the Sweida province and challenges in rebuilding the war-torn economy. *—PTI*

Former Bangladesh CJ arrested for corruption

DHAKA, 24 JULY

Former chief justice ABM Khairul Haque was arrested by the Detective Branch of Police on Thursday at his Dhanmondi residence. The arrest, confirmed by DB joint commissioner Nasirul Islam, comes amidst allegations of corruption and judicial misconduct. Khairul Haque, who served as Bangladesh's 19th Chief Justice from October 2010 to May 2011, faces multiple cases. On 18 August, Supreme Court lawyer Mujahidul Islam Shaheen filed a case against him for allegedly altering judicial verdicts. *—PTI*

CEO trampled to death by elephant at South African

GONDWANA, 24 JULY

In a tragic incident at Gondwana Private Game Reserve, FC Conradie, a 39-year-old conservationist and co-owner, was killed by a charging elephant. Conradie was attempting to guide a herd away from tourist lodges when a massive bull attacked, resulting in a fatal mauling. Witnesses reported that the six-ton elephant gored him and trampled him multiple times. Efforts by nearby rangers to save him were unsuccessful. The luxury reserve, located near Mossel Bay, is popular among tourists seeking Big Five experiences and was fully booked at the time of the incident. This marks the second fatal encounter involving elephants at the reserve in just over a year. *—PTI*

Thailand–Cambodia clash over border dispute kills 11

Both sides blame the other for escalating the strikes

BANGKOK, 24 JULY

A man walks past a damaged Phanom Dong Rak hospital after Cambodia fired artillery shells into Surin Province of Thailand on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Thai and Cambodian soldiers clashed in several areas along their border Thursday in a major escalation of their conflict that left at least 11 people dead, mostly civilians. The two sides fired small arms, artillery and rockets, and Thailand also called in airstrikes.

Fighting was ongoing in at least six areas along the border, Thai Defense Ministry spokesperson Surasant Kongsiri said.

The trigger for the clashes was a mine explosion along the border on Wednesday that wounded five Thai soldiers and led Bangkok to withdraw its ambassador to Cambodia and expelled Cambodia's.

Thailand has also sealed all land border crossings while urging its citizens to leave Cambodia.

The Southeast Asian neighbours have longstanding border disputes that periodically flare along their 800-kilometer (500-mile) frontier and usually result in brief confrontations that sometimes involves exchanges of gunfire.

But relations have deteriorated sharply since a confrontation in May that killed a Cambodian soldier, and Thursday's clashes were far bigger in scale and intensity than usual.

The first clash Thursday morning happened in an area near the ancient Ta Muen Thom temple along the border of Thailand's Surin province and Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province.

A video from the Thai side showed people running from their homes and hiding in a concrete bunker as explosions sounded.

The Thai army said its forces heard a drone before seeing six armed Cambodian soldiers moving closer to Thai military positions at the border. It said Thai soldiers tried to shout at them to defuse the situation, but the Cambodian side started to open fire.

Cambodia's Defence Ministry, however, said Thailand deployed a drone first before opening fire, and that Cambodia "acted strictly within the bounds of self-defense, responding to an unprovoked incursion by Thai troops that violated our territorial integrity."

The Thai army said it later launched airstrikes on military targets in Cambodia, while the Cambodian Defence Ministry said the Thai jets dropped bombs on a road near the ancient Preah Vihear temple, which has been the site of some of the most prominent and violent past conflicts between the countries.

Acting Thai Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said 11 people have died, including 10 civilians and one soldier. Meanwhile 28 have been injured, four of whom were soldiers and the rest civilians.

Cambodia released no details on deaths or injuries on its side. *—PTI*

50 FEARED KILLED

Russian plane crashes in forest

MOSCOW, 24 JULY

A Russian passenger plane carrying 43 passengers crashed in a remote forest near Tynda, with no signs of survivors, Russia Today reported on Thursday.

The Antonov An-24 aircraft, which went missing during a domestic flight from Blagoveshchensk to Tynda, was located by a rescue helicopter about 15km from its destination, Russia Today reported.

The twin turboprop aircraft lost communication shortly before reaching Tynda Airport, with no distress signal sent, according to a source quoted by RT. The flight was operated over a 570km route across Russia's Far Eastern Amur Region.

Forty-three passengers, including five children, as well as six crew members were on board.

The authorities have launched a probe on the charge of flight safety violations that resulted in multiple deaths, a standard procedure in aviation accidents.

The An-24 aircraft, developed in the 1950s, is widely used in Russia for regional transport. More than 1,000 planes were produced over several decades.

Authorities have launched a full-scale investigation, but officials say initial assessments indicate there are no survivors. *—ANI/PTI*

The ill-fated aircraft was located by a rescue helicopter about 15km from its destination, Russia Today reported **PHOTO: PTI**

Israel finds Hamas' ceasefire response as 'workable'

DOHA, 24 JULY

Hamas claimed that it handed its response to the Israeli ceasefire proposal to mediators, The Jerusalem Post reported on Thursday morning. An Israeli official called it "workable," although no details were provided.

A statement from the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed receipt of the Hamas response Thursday but did not specify what it entailed.

The response came as top US envoy Steve Witkoff was set for travel to Europe, where he is supposed to meet with key leaders from the Middle East to discuss the latest ceasefire proposal and the release of hostages.

Meanwhile, at least 23 Palestinians were killed in airstrikes in Gaza since dawn on Thursday, according to medical staff at Al-Aqsa Martyrs and Al-Awda hospitals.

Palestinian health officials said Thursday that two Palestinian teenage boys were killed by Israeli fire Wednesday night in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israel's military said its forces had fired at Palestinians throwing Molotov cocktails toward a highway, killing two near the West Bank town of Al-Khader. *—Agencies*

AFP, AP, BBC, Reuters say their scribes are starving in Gaza

Four leading news organisations said Thursday their journalists in Gaza are facing the threat of starvation. "We are desperately concerned for our journalists in Gaza, who are increasingly unable to feed themselves and their families," said a joint statement by The Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, Reuters and the BBC. "For many months, these independent journalists have been the world's eyes and ears on the ground in Gaza. They are now facing the same dire circumstances as those they are covering."

Ukraine–Russia meet agrees on prisoner swapping

ISTANBUL, 24 JULY

Russia and Ukraine agreed a prisoner swap during their third set of direct talks in Istanbul on Wednesday but appeared to make little progress on ceasefire terms or a possible summit between their Presidents – with their meeting ending after less than an hour.

Both sides agreed to exchange 1,200 prisoners of war each.

Russian negotiator Vladimir Medinsky said Moscow would also return the bodies of 3,000 Ukrainian soldiers.

"Continuing the exchange of prisoners of war, we have agreed that at least 1,200 additional prisoners of war will be exchanged on both sides in the near future," Medinsky said at a press conference.

Russia has also offered Ukraine 24 to 48-hour ceasefires.

Rustem Umerov, the Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, led Kyiv's delegation and said they proposed a summit between President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin before the end of August.

"We are working on priority issues. Our priority is always people, ceasefire and meeting of leaders," Umerov reportedly said after the talks.

Umerov also posted on Telegram, "Ukraine has consistently advocated for a leaders' meeting. We were ready for it yesterday. We are ready today. And we will be ready tomorrow. Such a meeting could unlock real political progress. Russia must demonstrate its readiness."

However, President Vladimir Putin has reportedly denied to meet his Ukrainian counterpart, dismissing Zelenskyy's legitimacy. *—Agencies*

Europe, China hold limited trade talks

BRUSSELS, 24 JULY

European leaders, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa, are set to meet Chinese officials in Beijing on Thursday for talks focused on trade, climate change, and global conflicts. The discussions, originally scheduled for two days and now reduced to one, occur amid global financial uncertainty, ongoing wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, and the looming threat of U.S. tariffs.

Observers predict minimal progress due to deep divisions, particularly regarding China's stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, trade imbalances, and persistent cyberattacks. The EU reported a trade deficit with China of approximately €300 billion last year, significantly affecting its automotive and green technology sectors.

China's relations with Russia complicate the talks further, as EU sanctions on Chinese firms linked to the Russian war industry may provoke backlash.

Meanwhile, the EU is seeking to solidify alliances outside its traditional partners, evident in recent trade agreements with Indonesia and Japan, as it navigates a complex global landscape influenced by both Washington and Beijing. *—PTI*

TRUMP KNEW HIS NAME WOULD APPEAR IN EPSTEIN FILES: BONDI

WASHINGTON, 24 JULY

US Attorney General Pam Bondi had in May told President Donald Trump that his name appeared multiple times in the Epstein files, after the Justice Department reviewed the case against alleged sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

During a "routine briefing", according to two White House officials, Bondi, during a briefing with Trump and Deputy General Todd Blanche, told the President about his name appearing in the documents, but the investigators did not find a client list or any evidence to suggest that Epstein did not die by suicide.

"The White House is not surprised by this – Trump's name was present in the binders that Bondi produced and handed out," a White House official told CNN.

However, Bondi said: "Nothing in the files warranted further investigation or prosecution." *—ANI/PTI*

NO MORE WOKE, MARXIST LUNACY: TRUMP INKS AI ACTION PLAN

WASHINGTON, 24 JULY

US President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order on Wednesday that aims to make artificial intelligence (AI) models "anti-woke".

"The American people do not want woke Marxist lunacy in the AI models," Trump said during his keynote speech. Trump also sought to distance the AI models from the copyright infringement saying that tech companies shouldn't have to pay authors or publishers for content used to train the model. "You can't be expected to have a successful AI program when every single article, book, or anything else that you've read or studied, you're supposed to pay for," he said.

Trump also unveiled an Key policies AI Action Plan, which included exporting American AI; promoting rapid buildout of data centres; enabling innovation and adoption; and upholding free speech in frontier models. *—Agencies*

Columbia Univ to pay $221M for federal funding

Columbia University has reached a deal with the Trump administration to pay more than $220 million to the federal government to restore federal research money that was canceled in the name of combating antisemitism on campus, the university announced Wednesday.

Under the agreement, the Ivy League school will pay the $200 million settlement over three years to the federal government, the university said. It will also pay $21 million to settle investigations brought by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

'Obama published fake intel against Trump'

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, along with White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, revealed new details during a White House press briefing alleging that the "there is irrefutable evidence that details how President Barrack Obama and his national security team directed the creation of an intelligence community assessment that they knew was false". However, according to an AP review of all the documents released by Gabbard, nearly all her public statements against Obama are unsubstantiated by her own intelligence findings.

'GO HOME BROWN CT'**

Second racist attack in two days: Hindu temple in Aus vandalised

MELBOURNE, 24 JULY

The Swaminarayan Temple in Melbourne's eastern suburb of Boronia was vandalised with hateful racial slurs, the Australia Today reported on Thursday. This follows hate crimes against two Asian restaurants on 21 July, where the same message was written on both the hotels' walls.

As per the report in the Australian news outlet, the temple of Wadhurst Drive was vandalised with red-painted slurs demanding, "Go Home Brown C**t".

President of the Hindu Council of Australia, Victoria chapter, Makrand Bhagwat, expressed deep shock at the vandalism of the holy place. "Our temple is meant to be a sanctuary of peace, devotion and unity," he said as reported by the Australian Today.

The Australian daily reported, as said by a cop, "We are investigating following reports of graffiti in Bayswater and Boronia on 21 July. There is no place at all in our society for hate-based and racist behaviour."

According to an Australian news outlet, while Victoria's Premier Jacinta Allan is yet to publicly condemn the vandalism, her office has sent a private message to the Temple management. *—Agencies*

Victoria's Premier Jacinta Allan is yet to publicly condemn the vandalism, but her office has reportedly sent a private message to the Temple management **PHOTO: X**

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Gold declines by ₹1,400 to ₹99,620 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Gold prices dived Rs 1,400 to Rs 99,620 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday due to profit-booking by stockists and a subdued trend in the global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,01,020 per 10g on Wednesday. In the national capital, gold of 99.5 per cent purity fell Rs 1,200 to Rs 99,250 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Thursday. It had settled at Rs 1,00,450 per 10g in the previous market session. Meanwhile, spot gold fell USD 24.35, or 0.72 per cent, to USD 3,362.88 per ounce in the international markets. *—PTI*

Rupee rises by 1P, closes at 86.40 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day 1 paisa higher at 86.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as risk aversion in global markets and an overnight recovery in crude oil prices dented investors' sentiments. Forex traders said uncertainty over the India-US trade deal has been an overhang for the forex market, leaving the rupee trading in a tight range. Moreover, a negative trend in domestic equities and foreign fund outflows weighed on investors' sentiments and restricted the up move of the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 86.33 against the greenback and touched an intra-day high of 86.24 and a low of 86.42. *—PTI*

Canara Bank's Q1 net profit increases 22%

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

State-owned Canara Bank on Thursday posted a 22 per cent growth in net profit to Rs 4,752 crore during the first quarter of the current financial year. The Bengaluru-based bank had earned a net profit of Rs 3,905 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal year. The total income rose to Rs 38,063 crore during the June quarter of fiscal year 2025-26, from Rs 34,020 crore in the same quarter of FY25, Canara Bank said in a regulatory filing. Interest earned by the bank improved to Rs 31,003 crore, as compared to Rs 28,701 crore in the June quarter FY25. During the period under review, operating profit of the bank increased to Rs 8,554 crore.*—PTI*

MakeMyTrip adds global experiences booking platform

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Online travel services company MakeMyTrip has announced its expansion into the global experiences sector with the unveiling of a new tours and attractions booking platform. This platform offers access to over 200,000 bookable activities across 1,100 cities in 130 countries. The initiative aims to assist Indian travellers in discovering and reserving global experiences, ranging from cultural tours and city walks to theme parks and adventure sports. MakeMyTrip Co-founder and Group CEO Rajesh Magow noted that "experiences account for a significant share of spending when Indians travel overseas," yet the process of discovering and booking these experiences has been notably fragmented. The new platform addresses difficulties faced by Indian outgoing tourists, such as scattered information and foreign currency pricing, by offering a seamless and personalised experience. *—PTI*

ED raids: Reliance Power, Infra shares tumble by 5%

The companies claim ED raid won't impact the business

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- The ED conducted raids as part of an alleged Rs 3,000 crore bank-loan-fraud–linked money laundering case against the companies of Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani

Shares of Reliance Power and Reliance Infra dropped 5 per cent each, hitting respective lower circuit limits on Thursday following ED raids as part of an alleged Rs 3,000 crore loan fraud relating to a money laundering case against the companies linked to Anil Ambani.

The stock of Reliance Power cracked 5 per cent to hit the lowest trading permissible limit for the day at Rs 59.70 apiece on the BSE.

Shares of Reliance Infrastructure also tanked 4.99 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit of Rs 360.05.

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted simultaneous raids as part of an alleged Rs 3,000 crore bank-loan-fraud–linked money laundering case against the companies of Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani, official sources said.

More than 35 premises in Mumbai belonging to 50 companies and 25 persons are being searched under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said. ED sources said they are probing allegations of illegal loan diversion of around Rs 3,000 crore, given by Yes Bank, to the group companies of Anil Ambani between 2017 and 2019.

Both Reliance Infrastructure and Reliance Power later asserted that the said actions have absolutely no impact on the business operations, financial performance, shareholders, employees, or any other stakeholders of the firms.

The media reports appear to pertain to allegations concerning transactions of Reliance Communications Limited (RCOM) or Reliance Home Finance Limited (RHFL), which are over 10 years old, the filing said.

It is clarified that Reliance Power is a separate and independent listed entity with no business or financial linkage to RCOM or RHFL, the company noted.

The filing further said that RCOM is undergoing a corporate insolvency resolution process as per the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, for over 6 years.

The filing also said Anil is not on the Board of Reliance Power. *—PTI*

MULTI-SECTOR FOCUS

Google unveils AI initiatives for Indian developers

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

- Google emphasised its commitment to India's developer ecosystem, revealing that the Play and Android platforms contributed Rs 4L cr in revenue and generated 35 lakh jobs in 2024. It has also introduced agentic AI tools and optimised templates in Firebase Studio

Google unveiled a range of initiatives aimed at propelling India's AI capabilities and empowering developers at Google I/O Connect India 2025 in Bengaluru on Wednesday.

During the event, the key announcement was the localisation of onshore processing for Gemini 2.5 Flash, bringing faster, low-latency AI performance for Indian developers, especially in regulated sectors such as healthcare, finance, and governance.

The company also emphasised its commitment to India's developer ecosystem, revealing that the Play and Android platforms contributed Rs 4 lakh crore in revenue and generated 35 lakh jobs in 2024. Google also introduced agentic AI tools and optimised templates in Firebase Studio, enabling developers to build and deploy full-stack AI apps with greater speed and efficiency.

In a significant move for mobile commerce, Google announced expanded access to over 250 million mapped places globally and launched India-specific pricing for Google Maps UI components. AI-powered summaries in the Places API will help developers create location-based services tailored to Indian users. *—ANI*

Sensex tanks 542 points, Nifty falls down by 157.8

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

As many as 2,410 stocks declined, while 1,645 advanced and 166 remained unchanged on the BSE

PHOTO: PTI

Equity markets fell on Thursday, with the benchmark Sensex tumbling 542.47 points, amid profit-taking in blue-chip stocks and foreign fund outflows.

Despite a positive start, the 30-share BSE Sensex failed to carry forward the momentum and fell later in the trade. The benchmark tanked 542.47 points, or 0.66 per cent, to settle at 82,184.17. During the day, it tumbled 679.42 points, or 0.82 per cent, to 82,047.22.

As many as 2,410 stocks declined, while 1,645 advanced and 166 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 157.80 points, or 0.63 per cent, to 25,062.10.

From the Sensex firms, Trent, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, Reliance Industries, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HCL Technologies, and NTPC were among the biggest laggards. However, Eternal, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma, Tata Steel, and Titan were the gainers.

Infosys declined over 1 per cent amid profit-taking after its June quarter earnings announcement.

India and the UK on Thursday inked a landmark free trade agreement (FTA) that will cut tariffs on British whisky, cars, and an array of items, besides boosting bilateral trade by about USD 34 billion annually. The BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.50 per cent and midcap index dipped 0.43 per cent.

Healthcare, auto and metal were the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,209.11 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

However, Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 4,358.52 crore in the previous trade.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 1.24 per cent to USD 69.36 a barrel. *—PTI*

NSDL launching IPO from 30 July, eyes ₹4,000 crore

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

PHOTO: PIXABAY

National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL) is set to launch its Initial Public Offering (IPO) on 30 July, with the issue size pegged at around Rs 4,000 crore.

The depository's maiden public issue will conclude on 1 August. The one-day bidding for anchor investors is scheduled to open on 29 July, according to the Red Herring Prospectus.

The IPO only consists of Offer For Sale component of 5.01 crore shares and those selling shares under this are the National Stock Exchange of India, State Bank of India, HDFC Bank, IDBI Bank, Union Bank of India and Administrator of Specified Undertaking of the Unit Trust of India.

ADITYA INFOTECH

Aditya Infotech, which offers video security and surveillance products under 'CP Plus' brand, is aiming to raise Rs 1,300 crore through its IPO opening for subscription on 29 July.

The issue, with a price band of Rs 640 to Rs 675 per share, will conclude on 31 July.

BRIGADE HOTEL

Brigade Hotel Ventures Ltd, an owner and developer of hotels based in south India, on Wednesday raised Rs 325 crore from anchor investors, a day before its initial share-sale opening for public subscription, the company said.

7 OTHER COMPANIES

As many as seven companies, including edtech unicorn PhysicsWallah and Saatvik Green Energy, have received Sebi's go-ahead to raise funds through IPO, an update with the regulator showed on Thursday.

Others that received regulatory clearance are Vinir Engineering, Pranav Constructions, Fujiyama Power Systems, SIS Cash Services and Anlon Healthcare. *—PTI*

Meta adds new teen-safety features to its platforms

NEW YORK, 24 JULY

Instagram parent company Meta has introduced new safety features aimed at protecting teen users of platforms, including information about accounts that message them and an option to block and report accounts with one tap.

Meta also said on Wednesday that it has removed thousands of accounts that were leaving sexualised comments or requesting sexual images of kids under 13. Of these, 135,000 were commenting and another 500,000 were linked to accounts that "interacted inappropriately," Meta said in a blog post. Meta said teen users blocked more than a million accounts and reported another million after seeing a "safety notice" that reminds people to "be cautious in private messages and to block and report anything that makes them uncomfortable."

Earlier this year, Meta began to test the use of artificial intelligence to determine if kids are lying about their ages on Instagram, which is technically only allowed for those over 13. If it is determined that a user is misrepresenting their age, the account will automatically become a teen account, which has more restrictions than an adult account. *—PTI*

Microsoft to now buy human waste for carbon removal

BENGALURU, 24 JULY

PHOTO: ANI

According to sources, the tech giant Microsoft is investing billions in a bold climate initiative by purchasing 4.9 million metric tonnes of organic waste, including human waste, manure, treated sewage, and agricultural byproducts.

The company has signed a 12-year deal with Houston-based start-up Vaulted Deep to help reduce its carbon footprint.

The waste will be injected deep underground, preventing it from releasing methane and carbon dioxide, two major greenhouse gases. This process, known as biogenic carbon removal and storage, is a cost-effective method to lock away carbon and slow global warming.

The move is part of Microsoft's broader goal to become carbon negative by 2030 and remove all historical emissions by 2050. With energy-hungry artificial intelligence services like CoPilot and its partnerships , Microsoft's carbon emissions have soared, prompting investment in innovative carbon removal methods.

Vaulted Deep's CEO, Julia Reichelstein, said the deal is a "green light" to build and expand more storage sites. While the exact financial terms remain undisclosed, the start-up typically charges around $350 per tonne of CO2 removal.

According to tracker CDR.fyi, this is the second-largest carbon removal deal ever, just behind another agreement Microsoft signed with AtmosClear to remove 6.75 million tonnes of CO2 over 15 years.

This strategy marks Microsoft as a frontrunner in corporate climate responsibility. *—Agencies*

Infosys shares decline over 1% post Q1 report

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Shares of Infosys Ltd declined over 1 per cent on Thursday as profit-taking emerged on the counter, a day after the firm reported its June quarter earnings.

The blue-chip stock dropped 1.32 per cent to Rs 1,553.55 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it declined 1.66 per cent to Rs 1,548.20. On the NSE, it dipped 1.36 per cent to end at Rs 1,553 a share.

The company's market valuation eroded by Rs 8,661.66 crore to Rs 6,45,387.02 crore.

In volume terms, 3.80 lakh shares of the firm were traded on the BSE and 141.70 lakh shares exchanged hands on the NSE during the day. *—PTI*

OPPORTUNITIES WORTH $23B

India-UK FTA a boon to labour sectors

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

PHOTO: PTI

The India-UK trade deal will provide duty-free access to several domestic sectors such as leather, electrical machinery and chemicals in the British market, thus unlocking nearly USD 23 billion in opportunities, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

The pact, officially called Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), was signed in London on Thursday in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his British counterpart Keir Starmer.

"Duty-free access for about 99 per cent of Indian exports unlocks nearly USD 23 billion in opportunities for labour-intensive sectors, marking a new era for inclusive and gender-equitable growth," Goyal said in a post on X.

Artisans, weavers, and daily-wage labourers employed in several MSMEs across textiles, leather, footwear, gems and jewellery, toys, and marine products will step into a new phase of prosperity, he said.

This agreement, Goyal said, will ensure duty-free exports of nearly 95 per cent of agricultural products, while fisherfolk gain from zero duty on 99 per cent of marine exports, boosting their incomes. *—PTI*

Tariff relief to bolster export of generic drugs, equipment

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

India's exports of generic medicines and medical devices, such as X-ray systems and surgical instruments, will get a major boost with Britain agreeing on zero duty under a free trade agreement.

This is part of the free trade agreement inked between the UK and India on Thursday in London in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UK premier Keir Starmer.

This will reduce costs for Indian med-tech companies and make their products more competitive in the UK market, he added.

The ministry stated that the zero tariff provisions under the FTA are expected to significantly enhance the competitiveness of Indian generics in the UK market, which remains India's largest pharmaceutical export destination in Europe.

The pharma sector has only 56 tariff lines, which is just 0.6 per cent of the total, the document stated. The pharmaceutical sector typically holds high value and strategic importance, especially in global trade, it added. *—PTI*

Nestle picks new chairman; Q1 net profit, shares slide

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

- Shares of Nestle India were trading at Rs 2,327.45 apiece, down 5.11 per cent on the BSE on Thursday

FMCG major Nestle India Ltd on Thursday reported a 13.4 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 646.59 crore for the June 2025 quarter, mainly impacted by high commodity prices.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 746.6 crore a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by Nestle India, which owns popular brands such as Maggi, NESCAFÉ and KitKat.

Its revenue from the sale of products increased 5.86 per cent to Rs 5,073.96 crore in the April-June quarter. It was Rs 4,792.97 crore in the corresponding period of the last financial year.

Shares of Nestle India were trading at Rs 2,327.45 apiece, down 5.11 per cent on the BSE.

NEW CHAIRMAN TO TAKES CHARGE

Meanwhile, Nestle India on Thursday announced the appointment of Manish Tiwary as the Chairman of the board of the company.

The incumbent, Suresh Narayanan, will retire as Chairman and Managing Director of the company on 31 July, 2025, according to a regulatory update from Nestle India. "Tiwary will assume his office as the CMD, effective 1 August, 2025," the company said. *—PTI*

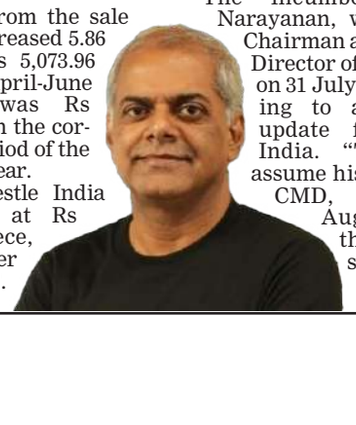


PHOTO: PTI

Rishabh Pant makes heroic comeback

MANCHESTER, 24 JULY

Rishabh Pant came out to bat on Day 2 of the ongoing fourth Test against England at Old Trafford, Manchester. Pant hurt his right foot badly while trying to play a reverse-sweep on the bowling of Chris Woakes on Day 1. His foot started bleeding, and it also got swollen. The player had to be taken off the ground in an ambulance cart. However, now he has come out to bat. India were all out for 358. Notably, Pant is only available for batting, and Dhruv Jurel will play his role behind the stumps. Pant, who walked in awkwardly a day after retiring hurt on 37 after copping a blow on his right foot, was out on 54 at the break—*PTI*

Max Verstappen and Red Bull embark on new era

LONDON, 24 JULY

Max Verstappen and Red Bull seek a successful reset of their season as they launch a new era at this weekend's Belgian Grand Prix, their first without Christian Horner in charge. As Formula One resumes after a mini-break, McLaren duo Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris intensify their duel to succeed the Dutchman as world champion. While Norris seeks his third consecutive win in a bid to reduce team-mate Piastri's eight-point lead, it will be Red Bull under the greatest scrutiny as they embark on a new adventure under Frenchman Laurent Mekies. Never before has a Red Bull team raced without the 51-year-old Briton Horner —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@ VENUS

Venus confirms she is engaged to actor Andrea Preti

WASHINGTON, 24 JULY

Venus Williams' winning return to the professional tennis tour also came with a surprise announcement: She is engaged. After becoming the second-oldest woman to win a tour-level singles match, Williams gave thanks to her fiancé, who was in the stands at the DC Open. He is Andrea Preti, who is a Danish-born Italian model and actor, according to the website IMDB. The 45-year-old Williams hadn't played in a tournament in 16 months until entering the event in Washington.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Vikramaditya named captain for World Racketlon C'ship

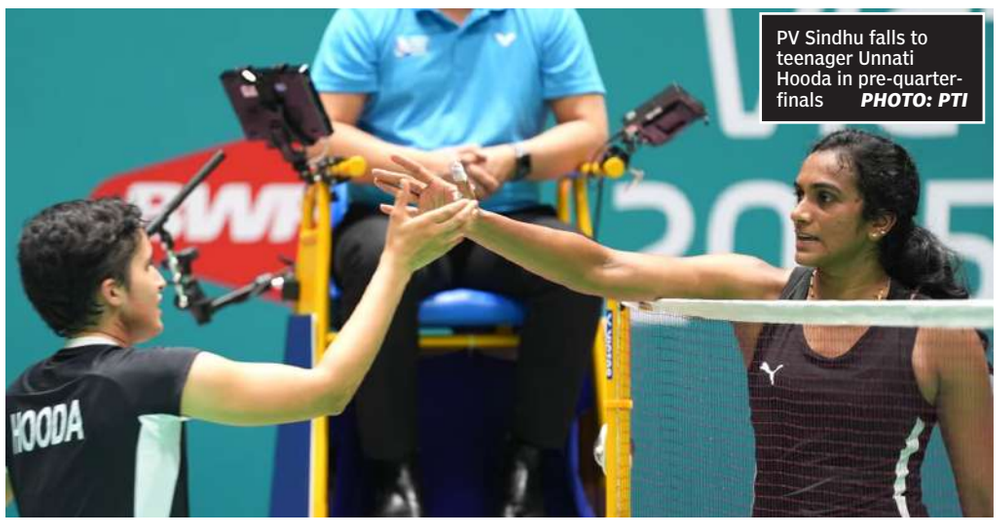
NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Vikramaditya Chaufla has been named captain of the Indian squad for the World Racketlon Championship to be played in Rotterdam, Netherlands, from 30 July to 3 August. Racketlon is a combination sport in which the competitors are required to play four racket sports: table tennis, badminton, tennis, and squash. Chaufla, a former badminton player, had also led the team at last year's World Championship. He had won a silver medal in the individual category in the 2022 edition. Besides Chaufla, Krishna B Kotak, Prashant Sen, Nihit Kumar Singh, and Suhail Kapur are part of the Indian squad, announced by the Racketlon India Sports Association. —*PTI*

Unnati shocks Sindhu; Satwik-Chirag advance

Unnati Hooda will next take on Japan's Akane Yamaguchi

CHANGZHOU, 24 JULY



PV Sindhu falls to teenager Unnati Hooda in pre-quarterfinals PHOTO: PTI

In a defining moment of her fledgling career, young Unnati Hooda stunned two-time Olympic medallist and Indian badminton stalwart PV Sindhu in a gripping three-game contest to storm into the quarterfinals of the China Open Super here Thursday.

Facing her decorated compatriot for only the second time, 17-year-old Hooda held her nerve in crunch moments to register a sensational 21-16, 19-21, 21-13 victory in 73 minutes, marking her maiden quarterfinal appearance at a Super 1000 event.

The teenager from Rohtak, who has won Super 100 titles at the 2022 Odisha Masters and 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters, will next take on Japan's Akane Yamaguchi, the third seed and a two-time world champion.

The men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also displayed tactical discipline and composure to notch up a 21-19, 21-19 victory over the eighth-seeded Indonesian combination of Leo Rolly Carnando and Bagas Maulana and progress to the quarterfinals.

It was, however, the end of the road for HS Prannoy, who bowed out after a hard-fought 21-18, 15-2, 18-21 loss to sixth seed Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei in a 65-minute men's singles second-round match. Sindhu, ranked world No. 15, came into the match on the back of a solid win over Japan's Tomoka Miyazaki but found herself outplayed by Hooda's speed, precision, and unrelenting energy.

This is the first time that Sindhu has lost to a fellow Indian in an international event in seven years, the last being the 2018 Commonwealth Games final loss to Saina Nehwal. She had lost to Saina in the 2019 National Championships final as well.

CHINA OPEN

The opening game began evenly, with both players looking for rhythm. While Sindhu used her trademark down-the-line smashes and tight net play, Hooda responded with agile footwork and deep clears that forced errors from the veteran.

From 13-all, Hooda surged ahead with four straight points before sealing the game 21-16, leaving Sindhu on the back foot. —*PTI*

WOMEN IN 3 T20IS, 1 TEST

Indian men's team to play 5 T20s, 3ODIs in Eng 2026

MANCHESTER, 24 JULY

India will travel to England next year for a white-ball tour, including five T20Is and three ODIs, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Thursday.

India's tour will begin with a T20 on 1 July in Durham, followed by matches in Manchester (4July), Nottingham (7 July), Bristol (9 July), and Southampton (11 July).

The three-match ODI series between the two sides will start at Birmingham from July 14, followed by matches at Cardiff on 16 July and Lord's on 19 July.

The Indian women's team will also engage with England women in a three-match T20I series and a one-off Test. The T20 series will begin at Chelmsford on 28 May, followed by games at Bristol on May 30 and Taunton on 2 June.

The lone Test will be played at Lord's from 10 July.

The Ben Stokes-led England men's Test team will also welcome New Zealand and Pakistan in two Rothesay Test series, while Harry Brook's white-ball side will host Sri Lanka besides India in ODIs and T20Is.

"We're excited to unveil what promises to be a spectacular summer of international cricket in 2026. With world-class opposition visiting iconic venues across the country, fans will have the chance to witness the very best of the men's and women's game," ECB Chief Executive Officer Richard Gould said in a statement.

"The highlight of the summer will undoubtedly be the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, hosted here in England for the first time since 2009. It's a huge moment for the women's game, for Nat Sciver-Brunt and her team, and it's a fantastic opportunity to inspire the next generation of players and fans.

"And just after that, we're thrilled that Lord's will also host an England Women's Test match for the first time, marking a special period for the women's game," he added. —*PTI*

BCCI set to host Asia Cup in UAE, India-Pakistan match likely

NEW DELHI/ DHAKA, 24 JULY

The Indian cricket board is all set to host the upcoming Asia Cup T20 tournament in the United Arab Emirates, with the formal announcement expected in a few days, sources in the Asian Cricket Council (ACC)said on Thursday.

This was after an ACC meeting that all 25 member nations attended to discuss the venue for the event. BCCI was represented by its vice-president, Rajeev Shukla, virtually.

"The BCCI will host the Asia Cup in the UAE. India is likely to play all its matches in Dubai. There are still deliberations on scheduling," an ACC source told PTI on condition of anonymity.

The tournament will be held for a little over a fortnight in September. It has to end before the final week of the month as India's Test series against West Indies is scheduled from that point.

"Our vice-president, Rajeev Shukla ji, attended the ACC meeting. He will brief the members. I don't believe in speculations, so you will get to know officially in a few days," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI.

In Dhaka, ACC chairman and Pakistan Cricket Board head Mohsin Naqvi also kept cards close to his chest when asked about a possible Indo-Pak match at the continental event. "We will announce it shortly. We have had discussions with the BCCI, and there are a few issues that we will resolve shortly. All 25 members attended the meeting either physically or virtually. We are all on the same page," Naqvi told reporters.

It is also learnt that due to BCCI's pressure, only two out of 10 items on the agenda were discussed. —*PTI*

DC OPEN

Taylor Fritz wins his opener, Sakkari beats No. 2 Navarro

WASHINGTON, 24 JULY

Top-seeded Taylor Fritz got his North American hard-court season off to a strong start by hitting 11 aces and saving the only break point he faced in a 6-3, 6-2 victory over Aleksandar Vukic at the DC Open on Wednesday.

The second-seeded woman, Emma Navarro, was eliminated at night by Maria Sakkari 7-5, 7-6 (1). Sakkari was the 2023 runner-up to Coco Gauff in Washington.

Fritz is coming off a semifinal run on the grass of Wimbledon. He will be trying to replicate last year's strong showing in this portion of the season, when he reached his first Grand Slam final at the U.S. Open.

Taylor Fritz

After getting a first-round bye, Fritz now will play in the third round against Matteo Arnaldi, who eliminated No. 16 Lorenzo Sonego 7-5, 7-5.

Seeded men advancing included No. 7 Alex de Minaur, No. 8 Daniil Medvedev, No. 9 Flavio Cobolli, and No. 11 Jiri Lehecka, but No. 5 Andrey Rublev was a 7-5, 6-2 loser against 19-year-old American Learner Tien, and No. 10 Alexei Popyrin was defeated by qualifier Wu Yibing 7-5, 5-7, 6-3. Tien has four wins over opponents ranked in the top 10 this season. Venus Williams' run in doubles with partner Hailey Baptiste ended in the second round with a 6-4, 3-6, 10-6 loss in a champion's tiebreaker to second-seeded Taylor Townsend and Zhang Shuai. The 45-year-old Williams is competing at her first tournament in more than a year and first in doubles since 2022 and she and Baptiste won their first-round match on Monday. —*PTI*

Nadeem and Neeraj Chopra face-off is unlikely

KARACHI, 24 JULY

The much-anticipated duel between double Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra and reigning champion Arshad Nadeem at the Diamond League in Poland lies in uncertainty after the Pakistani javelin thrower underwent surgery on his calf muscle in England recently.

Chopra and Nadeem were scheduled to face each other for the first time next month, one year after the mouth-watering men's javelin competition at the 2024 Paris Olympics, where the Pakistani came out on top, beating his Indian counterpart for the gold medal with a stunning 92.97m throw.The 27-year-old Chopra, who had won gold in the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, had to settle for a silver in Paris with a best throw of 89.45m. Nadeem's coach, Salman Butt, who is with him in England, informed that the reigning Olympic champion is unsure about both events as he was more focused on making his comeback at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo in September. —*PTI*

Spain beat Germany to set up final with England

ZURICH, 24 JULY

Aitana Bonmati netted the only goal of the game late in extra time as world champions Spain edged Germany 1-0 in their Women's Euro 2025 semifinal on Wednesday to set up a title decider this weekend against England. A tense game in Zurich was ticking down toward penalties when reigning Ballon d'Or Bonmati struck in the 113th minute, surprising the usually reliable German goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger at her near post.

Aitana Bonmati

It was not one of Barcelona star Bonmati's most influential performances, yet she still delivered when it mattered to keep Spain on course to win their first European Championship crown.

"We knew that the goalkeeper often leaves her near post open in these situations, so I didn't think twice. I didn't want the game to go to penalties," said a beaming Bonmati. The Spaniards will now face reigning European champions England on Sunday in Basel in what will be a repeat of the 2023 World Cup decider, when La Roja triumphed 1-0 in Sydney. —*PTI*

WPGT: Ridhima rides a roller coaster to take lead

KOLAR, 24 JULY

Ridhima Dilawari, who has not won since 2022, produced a round with seven birdies to take a four-shot lead into the final round of the 10th leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday.

It was a roller coaster of a ride for her with seven birdies, three bogeys, and a double bogey in a card of 2-under 70.

Lying third after the first round, Ridhima was three under through the first five holes, but she gave away four shots over the next four holes with back-to-back bogeys on the sixth and the seventh and a double bogey on the ninth for a 1-over 37.

Birdies on the 10th and the 12th were followed by a bogey on the 13th. Birdies on the 14th and the 16th ensured a solid 2-under round as she finished with pars on the last two holes.

Ridhima Dilawari

Overnight leader Neha Tripathi (69-77) slipped in the second round with one birdie, four bogeys, and a double bogey, while Amandeep Drall made a big move up with a second straight round of 73.

Amandeep had four birdies, three of which came between the 10th and the 13th, besides three bogeys and a double bogey. —*PTI*

Sachin lauds India women's historic win in England

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

The legendary Sachin Tendulkar on Thursday believes that the Indian women's cricket team's twin series victories in a challenging place like England will significantly boost the side's confidence ahead of two major World Cups.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side scripted history with a gritty 3-2 triumph in the T20Is, its maiden series win over England, before clinching the ODI leg 2-1. The victories assume greater significance, as India is set to co-host the ODI World Cup alongside Sri Lanka from September 30, followed by the 2026 T20 World Cup in England."Winning in England is always a challenge, and doing it across both T20Is and ODIs speaks volumes about the team's preparation and mindset," Tendulkar said on Reddit. "These performances will give the team a lot of confidence in the future. With two World Cups on the horizon, this will be vital for the belief it builds. Well played, Team India," he added.

India now gears up to host world champions Australia in a three-match WODI series starting September 14 in their last assignment before the World Cup at home. Tendulkar hailed the series as a testament to collective grit, where multiple players stepped up when it mattered the most. —*PTI*

Sachin Tendulkar

GREATEST LEGEND

Wrestling legend Hulk Hogan dies at 71

NEW DELHI, 24 JULY

Hulk Hogan, a star in the WWE, has died at his Clearwater, Florida home, his rep confirmed to NBC LA July 24. He was 71. According to a phone call with a 911 operator obtained by TMZ Sports, the emergency pertained to "cardiac arrest."

The former professional wrestler (real name Terry Gene Bollea) was a fixture in the community and won six WWE championships during his career.

A little over a month before his tragic passing, the wrestling legend's rep dispelled rumors that he was "on his deathbed," telling E! News in June there was "no reason to panic."

PHOTO: X/@WWW

Born Terry Gene Bollea on 11 August 1953, he built a wrestling empire under the ring name Hulk Hogan

His rep confirmed that the Hogan Knows Best star "had problems with his back," adding that he underwent neck surgery and that it "has indeed been successful."

It was Bubba The Love Sponge, a Florida-based radio personality, who first surfaced rumors Hogan was not doing well, claiming during a stream last month that he was "in the hospital" and "might not make it."

The wrestling world is mourning the loss of one of its greatest legends. —*PTI*